

SIXTEEN LECTURES

UPON

THE EPISTLES

TO THE

SEVEN CHURCHES OF ASIA,

RECORDED IN THE

Second and Third Chapters

OF

REVELATIONS.

By ^KTHOMAS TAYLOR, V. D. M.,

He that hath an Ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto
the Churches.

Rev. iii. 22.

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P R E F A C E.

THE Epistles to the Seven Asiatic Churches contain abundance of useful and complicated matter in a very small compass; and for that very reason need explaining, as several things are just hinted at, and therefore may be, to the greater part of readers, very obscure. As there is in them a word of exhortation or instruction, reproof or consolation, to every child of man upon the face of the earth, I have delivered the substance of the ensuing discourses in Dublin and Edinburgh, and in most of the large towns in the North of England; making it a point to go through them in the principal towns of every circuit in which I have laboured.

Some writers make them to contain an emblematical account of the several periods of the New Testament Church from the apostolic days to the final consummation of all things; and therefore look upon them as a kind of prophecies; they have likewise divided those periods into seven: that circumstance is taken notice of in the course of explanation. But whatever ground there may be for the conjecture of an emblematical interpretation, there is not the least doubt but there were literally Seven Churches in those Asiatic cities, and that these seven epistles under consideration were addressed to them, as they are recorded in the second and third chapters of Revelation.

My method has been, first, to comment upon each epistle part by part, in the way of exposition; for which reason I give the discourses the name of *Lectures*, as they are of a complex kind. I have then selected some verse in which the stress of the whole rests, and from thence enforce the doctrine contained in the whole of the epistle.

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By this method each discourse is reduced to a moderate length, and may be read through at a time, either in the closet, or in the family. But if they are thought too long to be read at a time in the family, there are certain pauses where they may conveniently stop, without breaking the sense of the discourse, till another opportunity occur; for I think it wise not to read too much at a time.

When the head of a family is reading to his little circle, let it be either the scriptures, or any other useful book, it may not be amiss frequently to stop, and ask in the general, or some individuals, if they understand what has been read. This awakens the attention, and often conveys instruction to the mind, and is a means of fastening what is read upon the memory, so that it may not easily be forgotten.

But I must admonish my reader not to seek for that he is not likely to find, *viz.* brilliant diction, fine turned periods, smooth and harmonious sentences, &c. for
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whether the preacher had either time or abilities for laboured decorations, it is to be considered that the discourses before us were delivered to congregations made up, for the most part, of plain, simple people, consequently required great plainness and perspicuity, or the speaker might as well have said nothing. What I have aimed at is, to deliver my thoughts in as clear and express terms as I possibly can, and in as few words. I frequently have cause to remark, that many writers, with a view of being elegant become obscure: Their sentences are so long, and the relative is at such a distance from the antecedent, that even an attentive reader has to turn back to see what the antecedent is; by that circumlocutious method many a reader is bewildered. That error is avoided in the ensuing discourses, so that I hope the meanest capacity will understand my meaning.

My hearers in every place are under no sort of temptation to flatter *me*, and therefore when many of them have expressed themselves

themselves in terms of approbation, by saying they have found themselves profited in hearing the subjects treated, I believed it was so; and my reader will credit me if I say, I was pleased; nay, I will even add I was thankful; and the repeated requests to commit them to the press is a principal inducement to their appearing in print.

Some say, We have too many books already, and more than people have time or inclination to read. Perhaps it is so; especially in the latter case: it is not a reading age among professors in religion, and such alone will be my readers. But a new book is a new motive, and as such is so far useful. Reading helps in thinking; and it is to be hoped that thinking will lead to self-knowledge, and that will drive the sinner to the true refuge. But in the general, such as complain of a redundancy of books, are such as read very little, because they have no inclination to it; it is a toil and labour they will not submit to. As for such as complain of the want of time, I would wish them to retrench half the

the time that is fauntered away to no purpose, and that which is spent in useless conversation, and many precious hours may be redeemed for the salutary purpose of reading and reflexion. O may we all read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest the word of life, that by patience and comfort thereof, we may attain the blessed hope of everlasting life, through our Lord Jesus Christ.

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BRISTOL, Jan. 1, 1800.

SIXTEEN

SIXTEEN LECTURES, &c.

LECTURE I.

Rev. ii. 1—8.

Unto the angel of the Church of Ephesus, write, These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks; I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars. And hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted. Nevertheless, I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent. But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitanes, which I also hate. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches, To him that overcometh

overcometh, will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.

EPHESUS was a principal City of Asia the less; it lies on the western part of it, upon the Ionian sea, and was a city of great trade, and therefore a place of affluence and luxury; it was also famous for the celebrated Temple of Diana, reputed one of the wonders of the world, and consequently devoted to superstition and idolatry. The Apostle Paul was twice there; and though in the beginning he was expelled by a tumult,* yet the latter time he stayed there three years;† during which time a church was planted which excelled all those, or most of those we read of in the New Testament. From what we may gather from the stile of the epistle written to them by St. Paul, they were no novices in divine things, neither in judgment nor experience; otherwise they could not have understood the deep things contained in that important epistle. He does not reprove them for any misconduct in practice, nor for any error in judgment, so that we may suppose at that time they had retained their first love.

The Apostle removing from thence, it is thought that Timothy was the first angel, bishop, or pastor, that was settled there; but he being martyred, and St. Paul removed to glory, the care of this and the other

* Acts xix. 20—21.

† Chap. xx. 31.

other Asian churches devolved upon the Apostle John, the only Apostle then remaining. But religion was now upon the decline in several churches; and so it appears in the church of Ephesus, as we may easily perceive from the epistle now before us. St. John was then a prisoner in the isle of Patmos, a poor desolate island at that time, in the Archipelago. History says, that by the command of Domitian he was cast into a cauldron of boiling oil, or oil set on flame; but, like the three heroic Israelites in the furnace of fire,* he came out unhurt; yet the miracle had no other effect upon the tyrant than that of assigning his banishment into the isle of Patmos; as some think to dig in the mines. However, Jesus did not leave his servant, but was pleased to favour him with the extraordinary revelations contained in this deep and sublime book, which is a prophetic history of what shall happen in the christian church till the final restitution of all things, and the new heavens and the new earth shall take place, and time issue in eternity.

Some have made these seven churches emblematical of the different states of the christian church to the end of time, which shall be noted in due order in the course of these Lectures. But undoubtedly there were seven churches to whom St. John was commanded to write, to reprove, exhort, or comfort, as their various states might require; and though the

* Dan. iii.

the epistles are directed to the angels, or chief pastors, yet they were to be applied to the body of the people as well as the ministers: and indeed the people are very apt to take the tinge of the minister, according to that old adage, *Like people, like priest.** I apprehend we are, in the compass of these seven epistles, furnished with a word to every state we can possibly be in while on this side eternity: whether we have retained our first love or have lost it: whether we are in a state of persecution, or in a state of tranquility; whether we are tempted, or freed from temptation; in short, whether we are saints or sinners, believers or infidels, persecuted or not persecuted, alive or dead, orthodox or heterodox, we may here trace out our lesson.

It is now time to enter upon my design, which shall be,

FIRST, To consider the epistle part by part in an expository way; and, SECONDLY, To make such remarks in an applicatory manner as may be suitable to such as are present.

First, then, let us attend to the passage before us.

1. *To the angel of the church of Ephesus, write.* By the angel is meant the chief minister or pastor of the church. For thus you read: *The seven stars are the seven angels of the seven churches; and the seven candlesticks are the seven churches.* The Greek word

* Hof, iv. 9.

word *αγγελος* signifies a messenger, and such is every minister of Jesus : he is a messenger sent by the great Head of the church, who says, *As my Father hath sent me, so have I sent you. Go ye into all the world, preach the gospel to every creature.* They are messengers of true wisdom ; sent to open men's eyes, to turn them from darkness to light. Hence they are called *stars*, which Christ holds in his right hand. They are messengers of life, seeing they declare the word of life to poor dead sinners ; and each, like his divine Master, can say to such, *I am come that ye might have life, and that more abundantly.* They are messengers of peace, declaring that God in Christ is reconciling the world unto himself ; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. *Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us : we pray you in Christ's stead be ye reconciled to God.**

2. They are called *stars* ; but they are stars which shine with borrowed rays, deriving all their light from the adorable Sun of Righteousness. Stars we are told, are for signs and seasons, that is, for directions in many affairs in human life : So are Christ's ministers. They are guides to Zion's travellers through the wilderness of this world, directing them by a right way to a city of habitation. They are guides in their life, and can say to such as they minister unto, *Be ye followers of us as we are of Christ.* Ministers must not be like guide posts, which, though they

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they point travellers the right way, yet do not stir a step therein; but like the friendly guide, who is their companion, and walks the way with them. 'Tis a good observation that one makes, viz. that stars shine brightest in extreme cold nights; that is, they are most conspicuous then: so the light of ministers shines brightest in dark and persecuting times. Their love to God and his truth, and their piety and zeal for the salvation of perishing sinners, is put to the trial, and appears most eminent in such seasons.

3. The churches are called *golden candlesticks*, which shews both their utility, value, and purity. The candlestick is not the light, but it is of use to set forth the light, that all who come into the house may see its brightness: so, though the church be not the light, yet she is the candlestick to hold up the light, and must let all her works of faith and love appear, so that others may see them, and glorify her heavenly Father. The visible church is, such as profess faith in Christ and love to him, let them be of what denomination they may; and the real invisible church is, such as have that real faith, let men call them what they will.

4. The epithet, *golden candlesticks*, imports the high value which the Lord puts upon them. Gold is the most precious of all metals; and so are the saints the most excellent of the earth, and are called the Lord's peculiar treasure.* Yea, the Lord's portion is his

* Exod. xx. 5.

his people, and Jacob is the lot of his inheritance. He has laid down a high price for them, even his own life; they are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bone, and he that toucheth them toucheth the apple of his eye.

The term, *gold*, denotes their purity as well as their value. 'Tis not a name, or sect, or party, but a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people: and our blessed Lord prays that they may be sanctified through the truth. The word *αγιος*, which we render *saint*, means one that is holy. And as "holiness to the Lord" was the motto which was put upon the high priest's mitre, so that is the motto written upon the believer's heart.

5. His stars, the ministers, the Lord is said to hold in his right hand; and it is exceeding well that it is so; or Lucifer, the ancient son of the morning, would assuredly cast them down. He must hold them from all the false doctrines which they may be assailed with, so that they may keep the great and essential doctrines pure; for the judgment of a minister being corrupted is just like a poisoned fountain, which of course corrupts all the streams, and carries death and destruction every where. He keeps them in the time of persecution; so that although they may be *troubled on every side, yet not distressed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed.** Thus in

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all these tribulations they are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation.

6. But they have need to be kept in the time of prosperity as well as adversity; and perhaps of the two it is the more dangerous. When "wondering crouds the preacher praise," and when the rich smile; yea, when they are made particularly useful, how ready is pride, that busy sin, to creep in! O, 'tis a great lesson to know how to abound as well as to know how to be abased, so that they may ascribe nothing to themselves. But still the Lord holds them in his right hand, and to keep them in their own place is pleased to let them see their own nothingness, and sink them low by heaviness through manifold temptations; yea, to let the messenger of Satan loose upon them, that he may buffet them, lest they should be lifted up above measure; that they may cry to him whose grace is sufficient for them, and whose great strength is made perfect in their great weakness.

7. *He walks in the midst of these golden candlesticks.* This shews his care and regard for them, being willing to watch over and protect them. It likewise shews the delight and satisfaction which he takes in them. If his church be a garden, he appears to take delight in coming into it; and more especially if all the spices, the graces of the Spirit, flow out richly.* If his church be a flock, he is the good Shepherd, and takes delight in feeding and tending
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* Song iv. 16.

this flock.* If his church be a tent, or a tabernacle, his promise is to live in it, and dwell there.† So here he walks amidst his golden candlesticks, surveying their order and brightness, and taking his delight among them. What care should we take to trim these candlesticks, that they may cast a more brilliant flame, so that he may ever be delighted therewith, and that mutual satisfaction may take place!

8. *I know thy works.* This implies that he is omniscient. He knows from what motives all our actions spring, and also the difficulties which attend them; for we seldom do any thing for God but it is attended with inconvenience from some quarter or another. But the term *know*, here, and in various other places, signifies to approve: he approved them, whether they were works of piety towards God, or works of mercy towards their fellow-creatures. Not only works, but *labour and patience*. The labour may signify the public work of the ministry, which is a labour of the head and a labour of the heart; yea, and a labour of the life too. The church is the Lord's vineyard, and the ministers are the labourers in it. O pray that the Lord may send labourers into his harvest;—not gentlemen; that is an idle calling: and the man who engages in the work of the ministry, with a view of becoming, or supporting the character of a gentleman thereby, has missed his way. This angel has patience likewise, a

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* Ezek. xxxiv.

† Ezek. xxxvii, 26, 27.

most necessary qualification for a minister, as well as the private christian. We must have patience to wait, like the husbandman for the timely fruits of the earth. Perhaps he may not see the fruit of his labour spring up at once, so that he must not despond; although it be a most desirable circumstance to see our labour crowned with immediate success. He must have patience to bear trials and difficulties as well as to wait; yea, he must expect trials not only from an ill-natured, persecuting world, but also from such as profess religion; yea, and such as possess it too. Some are of an uncomfortable, unpleasing cast; are a trouble to themselves and others also; and will call for no small degree of patience with such as have to deal with them, which is frequently the case with the ministers of Christ. And in many cases the servant of God must not strive, but be gentle, instructing others in meekness, so that it may please God to give them repentance to the acknowledgment of the truth, and in the end be saved.

9. *Thou canst not bear them that are evil.* The word seems to imply that evils, that is sins, were hateful to him either in himself or in others; and therefore implies that he kept good discipline in the church, a thing of the greatest importance to the well-being of the church. We shall, in the course of these epistles, find some of the angels severely reprehended for their neglect herein. But this angel seems extremely tenacious both of sound principles

ples and an uniform practice ; so that in these things he kept himself pure.

10. He had acted with very great prudence in trying such as said they were apostles, but were not. Several who pretended to have an extraordinary call, even as apostles ; but some of them were apostates, and were bringing damnable doctrines, denying the Lord who bought them. The names of two of these prime tools of Satan are handed down to us, Albion and Cerinthus. They were tried, but were found liars, and therefore rejected. And how many even now set up to be preachers, who have neither gifts nor grace for the work, and yet will be pestering people with noise and nonsense, but give no evidence that they are called to the work. Forty years ago, a man would pass if he talked loudly about Jesus Christ ; more especially if he larded his noise with hell and damnation ; but people, in the general, are much wiser now, and more rational, and they expect to hear something that will inform their judgments, as well as ring in their ears.

11. He adds again, *and hast borne, and hast patience.* The passive part of religion is so pleasing to God, that he repeats it a second time. Indeed patience is a sovereign virtue, which is sure to meet with its trial both from professor and profane. And if a man be blessed with a large share of sterling patience, he will stand his ground. In all probability he had been a sufferer for the truth, as Domitian had raised

raised the second general persecution; and very likely this angel had been tried in the furnace, in that the Lord says, *and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted. For my name's sake*; not for ostentation, or worldly gain, but acted from a much nobler motive, and in all thy trials thou hast stood manfully, in that thou *hast not fainted.*

12. What a noble character is this! What can there be wanting here? Surely we could have discovered nothing amiss, if God had not told us of something which he disapproved of. What a pity that so fair a form should have a sting in its tail! *Nevertheless*; O what a pity there should be this *nevertheless*; this one fly spoils all this precious ointment; *I have somewhat against thee.* What concealed evil is it? Was he a private drunkard, or did he live in fornication, or adultery? No; he abhorred every thing of the kind. Was he meditating some damnable error, some heterodox principles? No; he was perfectly orthodox. Was he hatching some destructive party in order to rent and divide the church of God, with a view of making a gain of the division, or becoming the head of a party? No; his upright soul disdained any such iniquitous proceedings. What then was amiss? Why, *thou hast left thy first love.* Was this a thing so heinous as to occasion so awful a threatening as follows? So it appears. It was well that he had not found out some soothing system to keep his coldness in countenance,

countenance, and so call his first love a delusion : the case with numbers. Nay, his head was too clear and his heart too sincere to admit such an imposition either upon himself or his flock. This charge is so important that I shall reserve it for another hearing, and for the present pass it over.

13. However, Jesus does not describe the disease and leave him without a remedy. He puts him into a proper method how to regain his first love, namely, by repenting, and doing the first works ; or *else*, says he, *I will come to thee quickly*. This coming quickly has sometimes the air of a promise, but here it has the manifest appearance of a threatening. In common life, we usually say to an indolent loitering lad, What are you about there ? If you do not mend your pace I'll be with you quickly ; that is, I will shortly correct you for your laziness. So here is an awful correction threatened. *I will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent*. And how awfully has this been verified ! How many ages has the candlestick been removed from all the Asian churches ! And cannot God remove our candlestick ? Undoubtedly. He can take the gospel from you, or you from the gospel, which is to you the same thing. When light is taken away, of course darkness succeeds ; so the removing the candlestick is removing the light, and removing the gospel, is removing the heavenly light : And what must follow ? Error, seduction and judicial blindness ;
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yea, heavy judgments and awful calamities ; which was the case in those parts of Asia where these seven churches once were ; and the regions are now enveloped in Mahometan darkness, tyranny and oppression.

14. And that will be the case, wherever the gospel is driven away ; dreadful calamities are sure to follow. They who will not bow to him that sits upon the white horse, must expect the red horse, or the black and pale horse, to follow ;* that is, all the judgments of God ; even war, pestilence, and famine. We see this verified in the Israelites of old. While they walked in the fear of God they retained his presence among them ; but when they rejected him, they were exposed to every calamity. Plagues of various kinds overtook them ; nor could they escape. How awfully does the Prophet Amos announce this in the name of Jehovah. *I saw the Lord standing upon the altar ; and he said, Smite the lintel of the door, that the posts may shake ; and cut them in the head of all them with the sword : he that fleeth of them shall not flee away, and he that escapeth of them shall not be delivered. Though they dig into hell, thence shall my hand take them ; though they climb up into heaven, thence will I bring them down : And though they hide themselves in the top of Carmel, I will search and take them out thence : and though they be hid from my sight in the bottom of the sea, thence will I command the serpent,* and

* Rev. vi. 2, 3, 4, 5.

*and he shall bite them: And though they go into captivity before their enemies, thence will I command the sword, and it shall slay them: and I will set mine eyes upon them for evil and not for good.** O may we walk in the light while we have the light, lest darkness come upon us!

15. Having faithfully reprov'd what was amiss, and denounced an awful threatening in consequence thereof, he returns with a note of approbation and encouragement. *But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitanes, which I also hate.* But who were these Nicolaitanes? and what were their deeds which the Lord hated? As to the sect of the Nicolaitanes there are various conjectures: In the general, it is thought that they took their name from *Nicolas*, one of the seven deacons. Some conjecture that he apostatized from the faith, and became the head of this vile fraternity. Others say, that he was charged with being jealous of his wife, and to avoid that imputation he brought her out, and gave free liberty for any one to have to do with her, which I think very improbable. The most likely conjecture is, that these offenders, so detestable to God, might catch hold of some singular tenet which *Nicolas* might hold, and which might be innocent, and so shelter themselves and their abominations under his name to take away their reproach.

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* Amos ix. 1—5.

16. They were idolaters, and held a community of wives, which tended to impurity and confusion, which God hates ; and so did the angel of the church of Ephesus, and in that respect was highly pleasing to our Lord, who certainly hates every thing that is impure.

II. 1. We have now a general admonition : *He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.* This is the very stile of our Saviour, who generally at the end of his parables cried, *He that hath ears to hear let him hear* ; therefore he that hath an opportunity of hearing or reading what our Lord saith unto the churches, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the church of Ephesus, and to all in the like situation ; all who have left their first love. Let such remember from whence they are fallen, repent and do their first works ; so shall they regain their first love ; or otherwise their candlestick will be removed, the means will be taken from them as they were from the Jews, and from the Church at Ephesus, and various other places ; yea, this will be their condemnation, that light is come, but they loved darkness rather than light. *And if the light that is within us become darkness, how great will that darkness be !*

2. We have here a general promise to every overcomer, and that is, to *eat of the tree of life which is in the midst of the paradise of God.* Here is an allusion to paradise of old, in which was
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a tree of life ; but man was forbidden to taste the fruit after his fall. By analogy of speech, Christ must now be the tree of life, as he is called the bread of life, the way of life, the resurrection and the life, a quickening Spirit, and the like.

3. The promise therefore to the overcomer is, that of glory, to be a full sharer of all the blessings purchased by him who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time. Every believer may be said to eat of the tree of life, in that they feed upon him by faith. For eating his flesh and drinking his blood are only different phrases for believing in him. As we are sustained by what we eat and drink, so by believing in Christ we have life through his name ; as he says, he that eateth me shall live by me. But the eating of the tree of life, in the text promised to the overcomer, is the full enjoyment of all the benefits of Christ's salvation in glory ; a glorified soul united to a glorified body, and both united to a glorified Christ for ever. As he hath declared, Where I am there shall my servant be also. Father, I will that they whom thou hast given me may be with me, that they may behold my glory. Yes, O conquering believer, thine eyes shall see the King in his beauty, they shall behold the land that is very far off ! Glorious encouragement ! O be faithful unto death, and thy Lord will give thee a crown of life !

4. They who make these seven churches emblematical of seven different states and periods, say, that

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the church of Ephesus is an emblem of the state of things during the apostolic age: for every thing in the beginning was lively and vigorous, seeing,

“ They all were of one heart and soul,

“ And only love inspir’d the whole.”

But towards the close of that age, it is observed, there was a great declension, which certainly was the case. For even in St. Paul’s time, the mystery of iniquity began to work; and the cursed leaven fermented rapidly. Many turned from the holy commandment; there were many unruly and vain talkers; yea, throughout his epistles he complains of declensions, especially in his epistles to Timothy and Titus. St. Peter makes the same complaint, and likewise John and Jude; so that whether the epistle to the church of Ephesus be emblematical of that declension or no, a sad falling away there was. And, in the general, it has been so in all churches. We have abundant need to take heed, and walk while we have the light, or our candlestick may be removed. But let us give the more earnest heed unto the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip. For, if the word spoken by angels was stedfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompence of reward, how shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation!

LECTURE

LECTURE II.

Rev. ii. 4.

Nevertheless, I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love.

WE have already had this epistle under consideration, and have made some general remarks upon the most material articles contained in it. Many excellent things were found in this church, such as will shame the greatest part of those who profess religion. There was labour, works, patience; a due regard to principle and practice; yea, and that with a single eye. It was done for the Lord's sake, not as a work of merit, or ostentation, but *for my name's sake, that thou hast laboured, and hast not fainted*, says the Searcher of hearts. We are ready to cry out, What can be wanting in such a character as this? The whole of the complaint lies in the text, *Thou hast left thy first love*. And is that so heinous an offence that the Lord threatens to remove the candlestick unless that complaint be removed? So it seems: and who can say to the Head of the Church, What dost thou? What need have those who stand most assuredly, to take heed lest they fall! But let us,

FIRST, Consider the first love; SECONDLY, The marks of leaving it; THIRDLY, What is contained in that charge, and how it may be regained.

I. 1. By the first love, some understand that glorious and noble principle which actuated the minds of the first Christians soon after the day of Pentecost, when *they continued stedfast in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. And all that believed were together, and had all things common: And sold their possessions and goods, and parted to all men as every man had need. And they continued daily with one accord in the Temple, and breaking of bread from house to house, did eat their meat with singleness of heart, praising God, and having favour with all the people!** O happy times! What an honour to their cause!

"O what an age of golden days!

"O what a choice, peculiar race!

"Wash'd in the Lamb's all-cleansing blood;

"Anointed Kings and Priests to God.

Here was a blessed foretaste of the glorious millennium. Such will be the case with the church throughout the world when that blessed time shall arrive; when they shall love the Lord with all their heart, and their neighbours as themselves.

2. But, by the first love, *we* generally understand, that love which every child of God feels when he is fully set at liberty from guilt and condemnation; when

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* Acts ii. 42—47.

the love of God is shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Ghost given to him. It is then truly warm and pathetic, and the soul pours out its divine effusions in some such language as this :—"Wake up my glory; wake lute and harp ! I myself will awake right early. What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits to me ? Bless the Lord, O my soul ! and all that is within me bless his holy name ! who forgiveth all thy sins, and healeth all thy diseases : who redeemeth thy life from destruction, and crowneth thee with loving-kindness and tender mercies. Whom have I in heaven but thee, and there is none upon earth which I desire besides thee !"

3. The first love is active : it is anxious to do something for God. The Pharisee, like Judas, murmured against the woman for anointing our Lord with the costly ointment ; but she having much forgiven her, loved much. She was willing to express her gratitude in the best manner she could, and thought nothing too costly for her heavenly benefactor. Love is compared to fire which hath a most vehement flame.* It will present great and laudable designs to its happy possessors, and thinks nothing is truly done till every thing be done ; is eagerly desirous that God may be glorified and the human race happy. How active was the great Apostle of the Gentiles ! the love of Christ constrained him ; hence he was instant in season and out of season ;

no difficulties, no persecutions, were able to stop him; even when laid in irons, and shut up in strong walls, yet, even then he would be writing those useful epistles which will edify the Church till the great millennium shall take place.

4. The first love is not only active, but is strong and vigorous, is not easily intimidated. Feeble, faint, and cold-hearted professors, are like the cowardly spies, who could see nothing but giants of an enormous size, and iron chariots, and cities walled up to heaven; but the first love speaks like Caleb and Joshua;—*Let us go up at once, for we are well able to do it.** Such a person finds grace to be sufficient, seeing the strength of Jesus is made perfect in his weakness, and he can do all things thro' Christ strengthening him. Yes, and if such an one be faithful to the grace given him, he will renew his strength, and overcome all opposition; he will run without wearying, and walk without fainting.

5. The first love is patient in tribulation. Like Job, it says in trying circumstances, Shall I receive good things from the hand of my gracious Father, and shall I not receive evil? Jehovah gives, and he has a right to take away; and as I know all things work for my good, I will still bless his name. And when he meets with unkind treatment from his poor, partial, it may be, prejudiced fellow-mortals, he takes it patiently, and can forgive, having much forgiven.

* Num. xiii.

forgiven. Love suffereth long, and is kind. It beareth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Such an one can bless them that curse him, and pray for them that despitefully use and persecute him. What a heaven upon earth has such a person! He lives in sweet contentment, having learned in whatsoever state he is to be content. What a pity that any one should not abide in this heavenly felicity! and that such a charge as this in the text should be brought against them, *Thou hast left the first love!* which leads me, secondly, to consider who are liable to this charge.

II. 1. Habitual deadness in the means of grace is a strong mark that there is a falling away. I say, *habitual deadness*; for a person, through force of temptation, or some indisposition of body, or some trying circumstance, may find a suspension of that pleasing sunshine, called the light of God's countenance. A combination of temptations, crosses, and trials, with a feeble, nervous frame, will be like a cloudy atmosphere, which may for a season hide the face of the sun. But that is but temporary; whereas, if that dulness continue month after month, there is reason to fear the accusation in the text is just. If the Lord give no secret returns in prayer; if the intercourse be entirely blocked up; if the word heard, or read, be always a dead letter, we are sure there is something greatly amiss. If the Lord no more answer Saul either by dreams, or Urim and Thummim, it is plain that

that Saul has been transgressing. If Jehovah leave the Israelites to fight their own battles, it is plain there is an accursed thing in Israel. So, if the bridegroom of the soul do not shew himself through the lattice; if he do not look through the windows of the soul, it is evident there is some fault in the spouse; for he takes no pleasure in afflicting or grieving his children.

2. Backwardness to the means is another sure sign that we have left our first love. Indeed this is a natural consequence of the former defect. For if we do not find God in his ordinances, it is something like the apparatus of a feast, where every thing is prepared but the food. Such an entertainment would give little satisfaction to an hungry guest: and if the guest were so treated time after time, no wonder he should at last grow weary. Or, what may fall more directly in point; if a person have no appetite, he feels no desire for the gratifications of the table; it is rather disgustful to sit down, insomuch that he is glad to withdraw. The application is very easy. Time was when the soul was glad when it was said, *Let us go to the house of prayer*; or when the hour of retirement came, that she might pour out either praise, or her requests, into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth; or search into the oracles, eat that bread and drink that cup in thankful remembrance of a Saviour's death. But now every thing of the kind is a burden, the fire of the altar is dying, and the sacrifice cannot be offered up.

3. It

3. It is a fure ſign we have left the firſt love when envy begins to rankle in the boſom ; for love envieth not ; and while it had its ſeat in the ſoul, ſhe was as remote from envy as from murder. But nothing is more common to the ſpirit which is in man than to envy, eſpecially one who has left his firſt love. Envy is a devilish temper, which cannot bear to ſee the proſperity of another, and more eſpecially where there is the ſmalleſt tincture of prejudice in the mind. Such an one is pained at the happineſs of another. It is eaſily diſcerned by the manner it receives the relation of any good related of another : for, though he ſays, it is very well, yet it is eaſily obſerved to come off in ſo dry a manner, ſo heavy a tone, and clogged with ſome innuendos, which plainly ſhew all is not right within. Perhaps it diſputes the good report, queſtions the tidings, and ſecretly hopes, all may be a miſtake, a wrong representation ; but, if in ſpite of all cavils it is true, the fact or facts cannot be denied, then he is inwardly griped, as poisoned with his neighbour's joy. Nay, perhaps the very happy ſtate of the perſon's ſoul, raiſes reſentment in the mind of ſuch a fallen ſpirit, and thereby may cauſe prejudice to hatch in its dark cell, ſuch thoughts as ſatan begets in the minds of the children of men. In the mean time, what is become of the firſt love ? Certainly it is fled like the morning cloud and like the early dew ; for it rejoiceth not in any one's miſery, or miſfortune, any more than in iniquity.

quity ; but rejoiceth in the happiness of all the children of men.

4. Love to the present world implies the loss of the Love of Christ. And who is so likely to fall into this sink of perdition, as the man who has lost this pearl of great price ? He cannot find his delight in the common fooleries of human life ; the common diversions are too childish and insipid for one who has tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come ; and therefore he is in the greater danger of falling into that gulph of ruin ; because it holds out something very alluring, and which wears the aspect of duty, and which does not shock his feelings with the appearance of profanity and irreligion. But we cannot serve God and mammon. Covetousness is called idolatry, the mammon of unrighteousness, filthy lucre, and is said to drown men's minds in perdition and destruction. While the pure love of God flamed in the soul this gloomy idol had no place. Christ had possession of the soul, and was all and in all. But the sun is now set, and this *ignis fatuus* has usurped his place, and leads the soul through bogs and briars ; and, if divine grace do not prevent, will lead it to endless perdition ; *for if any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.*

5. Where your treasure is, there is your heart also. If we love the world, we shall love the company of the world, for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth

mouth will make manifest. While the soul is right with God, she is the willing companion of all them who fear the great Jehovah, and is ever glad of their conversation, because it was heavenly, it bore the favour of his divine name whose garments smell of myrrh, and aloes, and cassia, when he cometh forth out of his ivory palaces. But now, trade, politics, the price of stocks, the dearness or cheapness of markets, the seasons of the year, the aspects of the weather, are the topics of a fallen soul, a soul which has wandered from her God. This is a plain proof that she has forsaken the Lord, the fountain of living water, and has hewn out broken cisterns which can hold no water. The men of the world are bad advisers, as we see in the case of Judah the son of Jacob. He left his brethren, and took into his friendship an Adullamite, and fell into foul crimes.* And if the men of the world are bad advisers, they are worse comforters, and therefore their husks can in no wise satisfy a poor hungry backslider, a soul that has wandered from its God. Come out from among them, be separated from them; for the friendship of the world is enmity with God.

6. Indifference for the children of God is another proof that such an one hath left his first love. While a soul lives in fellowship with God, the saints are the excellent of the earth, with whom they do delight: of old, they who feared the Lord spoke often one to another,

* Gen. xxxvii.

another, and the Lord hearkened and heard them, and was well pleased with their conversation ; it was favoury and useful : like the two travellers going to Emaus, they were talking very seriously, and no doubt very fervently, of the Lamb of God newly slain, and he put himself into their company ; and while he enlightened their minds with divine truth, he warmed their hearts with divine love.* We have reason to believe he is still the same, and his children will find that the same cause will produce the same effects. Divine love gives a cheering view to every thing of a divine nature, and so it presents the children of God in a pleasing light ; but when that love is gone, their dark side is presented to us, and they are all spots and blemishes ; so that we see no form or comeliness in them, nor beauty that we should desire any acquaintance with them. One is proud, another is covetous, or deceitful, or peevish, or fretful, light or trifling, or has some scar or other which is disgustful ; whereas, the disorder lies within us, and like the fly in the ointment, gives a disagreeable tincture to the whole. How uncomfortable is such a state ! Such an one finds no comfort, no real comfort, in any station or company. The light he has will not suffer him to take it in the world, and the world has so far bewitched him that it prevents him taking comfort either in God, or his ways, or his people.

7. *Unwillingness*

* Luke xxiv. 32.

7. *Unwillingness* to receive reproof is a certain sign that we have left our first love. Indeed that is not a spot of God's children. Many of their failings are recorded, as in the case of Noah, Lot, Abraham, Jacob, David, and various others; and their failings are left as so many way-marks, that we may not lust after evil things as they did; but still, we do not find one of them resenting reproof. When Nathan was sent to David, and very faithfully reproved him, how did he take it? Did he order the prophet to be put under an arrest? No: he bowed down under the reproof, and cried out, *I have sinned*. There are but few who walk so circumspectly, but some part of their conduct may be reprehensible; and therefore we ought to be thankful that there are some so faithful as to admonish us, either thro' good or ill will. We ought, in travelling, to be thankful to any one that will tell us where we miss our road, although they may not do it in the most acceptable terms. Nay, if we do well and be buffeted for it, and take it patiently, this is most acceptable to God. In this our blessed Lord has left us an example, who did no sin, nor was guile found in his mouth; yet when he was reviled, reviled not again, and when he suffered he threatened not. The reproaches of such as reproached fell upon him. The whole of his spotless life was spent in doing good, yet who endured more reproach and slander than he did? but he did not cry, nor strive, nor cause his voice to

be heard. He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep dumb before his shearers, he opened not his mouth. To be easily offended is no mark of innocence, rather the contrary; at any rate it is a sign of a supercilious, petulant temper; a haughty, unbroken spirit, which cannot be influenced by the love which hopeth all things and is kind. Who can read the circumstance in the case of pious Hannah without being affected? Hannah was what we should call a lady of quality, a person of rank as well as riches. And what a rugged reproof did the High Priest give her, even in public! She was praying from the fulness of her heart, and Eli thought she had been drunken, and called out, How long wilt thou be drunken? Put away thy wine from thee. Now, what would one of you good women think if I should give you such a rebuke? I am afraid you would not come to hear me the next time; I doubt you would go away hugely displeased. But how did Hannah take it? Did she return railing for railing? Did any indecent, or even unkind language, proceed out of her mouth? Nothing like it. Let her own language testify. In answer to the unkind rebuff, she says, *No, my lord: I am a woman of a sorrowful spirit: I have neither drank wine nor strong drink, but have poured out my soul before the Lord. Count not thine handmaid for a daughter of Belial, for out of the abundance of my complaint and* grief

*grief have I spoken hitherto.** Here is true greatness of soul! Here is a soul truly collected in itself! Such is the case of all who retain their first love.

III. I come now to consider what is contained in this awful charge.

1. Here is, idolatry in forsaking the Lord. For what is idolatry? Setting the affections upon any creature, let it be good or bad. The mind of man is an active principle, and must be engaged in something, and if it be not fixed on God, it must be upon some creaturely object. While the soul retains her first love, God is all in all. She can say to her Lord, Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is nothing on earth I desire besides thee. But that is far from being the case now; she cleaves to the dust, and worships and serves the creature more than the Creator; and therefore is joined to her idols to the provoking of the Lord who bought her. Like as a wife treacherously departs from her husband, so this apostate soul departs from the living God, the source of all her solid comfort.

2. Another charge in this indictment is, ingratitude in forgetting the Lord who is the soul's rest and comfort. It was a charge which Moses gave oftener than once, that when God had given the Israelites houses full of good things which they had not filled, wells which they had not digged, vineyards and olive-trees which they had not planted, and, says he,

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* 1 Sam. i. 15, 16.

*When thou hast eaten and art full, then beware lest thou forget the Lord which brought thee out of the land of Egypt and from the house of bondage.** Aye! was there danger after all that God had done for this people in the land of Egypt, at the *Red Sea*, and in the wilderness, that they should forget God? Surely there was danger, or the warning would not have been given. And is there any danger of a soul forgetting God who has tasted the riches of his grace? which hath felt the powers of the world to come? Undoubtedly there is; and hence the apostle says, *We ought to give the more earnest heed unto the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip.* Perhaps St. Peter's words are still more to the point, where he says, *Such an one as lacketh godliness, brotherly kindness, and charity, is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his sins.†* Ingratitude even to our fellow-creatures is a most base temper, and argues a sordid soul, a vile spirit; but when this satanical spirit is manifested against God, it is certainly marked out with every aggravating circumstance of perfidy and vileness.

3. Another charge in this hideous bill, is slothfulness, not improving; so that instead of increasing there is a sad decrease. Solomon is often severe against the sluggard, and describes him under various images which are very natural. Like the door

* Deut. vi. 11, 12. chap viii. 10, 11. † 2 Pet. i. 9.

door upon the hinges, so is the sluggard upon his bed. He puts his idle hands into his bosom, and will not pull them out through mere laziness. He says, there is a lion in the way, and I shall be slain. He will not plow by reason of cold, and therefore shall he beg in harvest and have nothing. No wonder that his vineyard should be grown over with briars and nettles, and that the stone wall should be broken down! The parable of the talents is much to our purpose here. He that had received five, gained five more; and he that had two, gained other two; but he that had received one, got into an indolent train of reasoning, and instead of improving, hid his talent. Now his talent was the same in quality as the five; and had he improved it, would have met the approbatory sentence, *Well done good and faithful servant.* Hence part of the condemnatory sentence is, Thou wicked and slothful servant; and as he was too indolent to improve his talent, it was taken from him. Indeed, slothfulness is incompatible with thriving in any department of life, and more especially in religion; which is compared to running, fighting, wrestling, travelling, labouring, and the like; all which imply exertion and activity. It is therefore necessary that we should not be slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

4. There is unfaithfulness in this charge, in not keeping what is committed to us. The man who

improved his talent is called a *good and faithful servant*. The grace which we have is a precious depositum, which is committed to our trust; and great care is to be taken, lest, like the prodigal, we squander and waste it all away; and therefore that exhortation in Jude is highly proper, *Keep yourselves in the love of God*. Likewise that exhortation, *Be faithful unto death; Hold fast that thou hast, that no man take thy crown: Hold fast till I come*. Happy is the man who can say with the Apostle, *I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith*.

5. Such as leave their first love very often prove a scandal to religion. Their light becomes darkness, and the world can easily discover it. There is not that divine favour in their conversation that was in times past. They can give way by little and little, till there is little difference between them and others: Herein they give occasion of offence. The wicked reproach, the saints mourn, the weak are stumbled, and God is dishonoured. The ungodly can take up the taunting proverb, and say, "Is this the man that was making his boast in God? declaring that his sins were forgiven? that God was his Father, and that he had peace with God? and a full assurance that his soul was in a state of salvation? Is this he that was ever ready to reprove sin, introducing religion into every company, and plaguing every one with his noise wherever he came? And is it all
come

come to this? As good lie still as rise up and fall. This we expect will be the end of all such enthusiasts, who must needs be better than their neighbours; who cannot be content with the religion of their forefathers." Thus the mouths of the ungodly are opened, and God's ways are reproached; yea, the very name of God is blasphemed, and perhaps many are turned out of the way. O! it is an exceeding bitter thing to sin against light, and turn the grace of God into wantonness. Too frequently it happens that such find out some kind of doctrines which keep their dulness in countenance; some system which sings them entirely asleep, so that they, like the foolish virgins, sleep in a false peace, and rest in a fatal security. But is there no balm in Gilead? Is there not a physician there? Is there no restoring such an one to health again? Surely there is, and the way of healing is laid down in the context. Wouldst thou regain thy first love? then *remember whence thou art fallen*. Reflect upon thy state and condition now, and what it once was. Then, thy language ran in some such stile as this.

Jesus all the day long
 Was my joy and my song;
 O that all his salvation might see!
 He hath lov'd me, I cry'd,
 He hath suffer'd and dy'd
 To redeem such a rebel as me.

Then, you prayed with the spirit and with the understanding also; you found access to his throne. Then,
 you

you read his word with comfort and satisfaction, and it was spirit and life to you! Then, you heard with meekness and candor, and you received plain, simple truth, as the thirsty land receives the vernal showers. In solemn stillness you could contemplate with unspeakable satisfaction your interest in the gracious Redeemer, and could ask, Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is nothing on earth I desire besides thee. Remember this, and let it raise in you holy desires to regain all that is lost. Call to remembrance the times in which you were illuminated, when the candle of the Lord shone upon your head; when you came up from the wilderness leaning upon your beloved; when he kissed you with the kisses of his love, and you found favour in his sight.

6. Having thus taken a view of your happy days, the height from whence you are fallen, consider attentively the cause of that fall, why your gold is become dim, and your fine gold changed. The church of old complained, *The crown is fallen from our head; woe unto us, for we have sinned.** This is your case. And see what that sin is; for if you don't find it, it will find you; nay, it has found you already, and has separated between you and your God. But what is it? Is it pride and self-sufficiency? Have you forgotten God, and stretched out your hands to another God? Has the world got hold of your heart? It will undoubtedly cause an eclipse, and veil the
divine

* Lam. v. 16.

divine light from you. Has the creature stepped in and taken place? It is an idol which must be sacrificed. There is undoubtedly some fly which has spoiled the ointment: some Achan in the camp, some Dalilah in the house, and the sooner you discover it the better. But then sacrifice it: cut off the right hand; pluck out the right eye; spare it not, or it will not spare thee. It is not he that confesseth only, but he that forsaketh sin that may expect to find mercy. That is true repentance, and a plain proof that we desire our first love when we thus cast away our transgressions, and are willing to part with every abomination; when we are willing to part with our pleasing or profitable sin; yea, if the expression be allowable, our honourable sin; there is reason to believe the Lord will return to his temple.

Lastly: Do the first works. Works of piety, works of mercy, as at the beginning; and from right motives, and in a right spirit. Pray as you did then; believe as you did then; watch as you did then; so shall you revive as the corn and grow as the vine, and your scent shall be as Lebanon; and your language will be, What have I any more to do with idols? Then will the Lord return, and will have compassion; the breach shall be made up, he will again light up the candle, he will repair his fallen tabernacle, and again possess his own habitation, and make you a pillar in his house to go out no more.

LECTURE

LECTURE III.

REV. ii. 8—12.

And unto the angel of the Church in Smyrna, write; These things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive; I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, but thou art rich, and I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan. Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer; behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the Churches, He that overcometh, shall not be hurt of the second death.

SMYRNA was a city in Ionia, forty-eight miles from Ephesus. By whom the gospel was first preached there we cannot tell; but there was a lively church at the time when this epistle was addressed to them. They appear to have been labouring under the iron rod of persecution, which was increasing upon them; and most likely this angel, or chief pastor, was about to seal his testimony with his blood; and hence it is that our Lord assumes

assumes a title very suitable to his state, which was well calculated to encourage him, viz. *He who was dead, but is now alive*; and, therefore, would succour this his suffering servant; intimating, that as his Lord had passed through the dark valley of the shadow of death, and was now triumphing over all adverse power, so the servant should be more than conqueror through his exalted Master.

The Lord does not reprove this angel, nor the church, for any thing amiss either in principle or practice, so that we may suppose they had retained their first love. Indeed it generally happens that religion is most pure when under the lash of persecution; for persecution tries who are sincerely on the Lord's side; and, like a purifying wind, it drives the chaff away. In such circumstances there are no motives to induce people to profess religion, but the glory of God, and the salvation of the soul; the true and only motives which will stand in the trying hour.

I shall now call your attention to the passage which has been read.

And unto the angel of the Church in Smyrna, write. It has been noticed before, that the word, rendered *angel*, signifies a messenger, and such is every minister of Christ. He is a messenger of Christ, called his ambassador, and is sent upon his errand. He is a messenger of divine wisdom, life and peace, and in his measure can say, *The Spirit of*

of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and the recovering of sight to the blind; and to set at liberty them that are bruised. To preach the acceptable year of the Lord. To such our Lord says, Go ye into all the world, preach the gospel to every creature.

2. Though this letter was addressed to the angel, the chief minister, yet the contents respected the whole church at Smyrna, and all the churches in like circumstances, till time shall issue in eternity. These letters are of no private interpretation, but for the good of the churches in all ages and countries.

3. *Write these things*, the things which I dictate, let them be pleasing or displeasing, add not to them, nor take from them,* *saith the first and the last.* This title marks out the dignity of the person who commands the Apostle to write. It is the stile of Jehovah, and he only can use it. It is neither proper for angel nor saint. It is the stile which the Divine Being uses in the prophets. *Thus saith Jehovah, the King of Israel, and his Redeemer the Lord of hosts; I am the first, and I am the last; and besides me there is no God.†* And again; *Hearken unto me, O Jacob, and Israel my called: I am he; I am the first, and I also am the last.‡*

He

* Rev. xxii. 18, 19.

† Isa. xlv. 6.

‡ Chap. xlviii. 12.

He was before all things, and will exist when the heavens and earth are no more. He is God from everlasting to everlasting the same, and his years fail not. It seems to be the meaning of the word *Jehovah*, he that always was, and is, and always will be. This is the stile and attribute of no creature; but is properly applied unto our Saviour, who is over all GOD blessed for ever.

4. Nevertheless, it is *he that was dead, but is alive*. With this blessed declaration he comforted his fainting Apostle; *he laid his right hand upon me, (says he) saying, Fear not, I am the first and the last: I am he that liveth and was dead; and behold I am alive for evermore*. How amazingly comfortable must this be? And how encouraging to this suffering angel? *I am he that was dead*. Death was the penalty of sin; and here the Lord submits to that penalty, and pleads his death to encourage his saints. It is a plea which justice will admit of, being fully satisfied with the sacrifice upon the cross. And hence it is that the poet sweetly and truly sings,

"Jesus, full of love thou art,
Thou hast won thy Father's heart:
When thy wounds stood gaping wide,
Justice said, I'm satisfy'd."

The death of Christ is a plea which the rigour of the law will admit of; seeing he died to redeem us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us; and is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that

that believeth. It is a plea which will satisfy the most guilty conscience, take away our gloomy fears, give us boldness at the throne of grace, and may encourage us in all trials and difficulties, in all labours and sorrows ; so that we may have confidence in every trying moment.

5. But still prevalent as his death is, it would avail little without his resurrection ; and therefore it is added, that *he now lives*, having burst the barriers of the tomb. If he was delivered for our offences, he was raised again for our justification. Here was the great proof of his death being available. *If Christ be not risen* (says the Apostle), *then your faith is vain, and our preaching is vain, and ye are yet in your sins, and they that have fallen asleep in Christ are perished. But now is Christ risen from the dead, and is become the first fruits of them that slept ; for by man came death, so by man came also the resurrection of the dead.* The whole efficacy of his death depended upon his resurrection. He had repeatedly told the Jews, as well as his own disciples, that he would rise again the third day. Hence all the care that was taken to seal the stone, and set a watch at the sepulchre, was only calculated to gain the stronger evidence to the power of his resurrection ; and thereby the stronger consolation to all who fly to him for refuge ; especially when they hear him say, *Because I live, you shall live also.*

6. We

6. We come now to the body of the letter.—*I know thy works, and thy tribulation, and thy poverty; but thou art rich.* The word *know*, here and in many other places, does not barely signify that he can distinguish one thing from another; for in this sense all things are naked and open to his eyes, and therefore knows our very thoughts; but it signifies to approve; and hence it is that he will say to the ungodly in the day of judgment, Depart, *I know you not*; that is, I approve not of you, I own you not for my children. But here he approved of the work of this church at Smyrna, the motives from whence they acted were pleasing in his sight. Their tribulation also was well known to him, which may signify the persecutions which they were suffering for the sake of a good conscience; which he permitted for wise ends, to try their faith, their love, and obedience to him. It seems they were poor in the world, but rich in faith, and in the divine favour, and this he reminds them of; as if he whispered in their ear, inclosing in a parenthesis, *thou art rich*, truly rich, being an heir of everlasting felicity; an heir of God, and a joint heir with Jesus; having a just title to the inheritance which is incorruptible and undefiled, and which fadeth not away.

7. *I know the blasphemy of them which say, they are Jews and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan.* But why did these dissemblers say they were Jews when they were not? What advan-

tage was it to them to profess themselves Jews? It was to save themselves from persecution. Domitian having raised the second general persecution against the Christians, but did not persecute the Jews; not that he loved the Jewish religion any more than the Christian; but the Jews hating the Christians were the tools of his tyrannical cruelty, and very likely were employed by him in the horrid business. Therefore many of these temporizers might think to escape persecution by avowing themselves Jews; and as the Jews pretended to worship the true God, and not to sacrifice to idols, these poor deceivers imposed a cheat upon themselves, by supposing the profession of a Jew would stand instead of real Christianity. But they are called blasphemers; and why? Because all were required to blaspheme Christ; which the Jews were ready enough to do, and so did these apostates; and the Lord saw it, and it was highly displeasing in his sight. But I do not apprehend that those deluded souls were in the church; for if they had, this angel would have been reproved for suffering them to continue; but they appear to have been troublers of the church, and the Lord informs the angel, that he knew them and the motives from whence they acted, and would not fail to call them to an account in a little time. And does not God know the deception of such as say, they are Christians and are not, but are deceivers of their own souls? And will he not deal with them as such

such in a little time? Undoubtedly: therefore we have need to examine ourselves whether we are in the faith.

8. But it seems their sufferings were not at the height yet; and therefore he says, *Fear not those things which thou shalt suffer*, (literally, which thou art about to suffer:) *Behold Satan shall cast some of you into prison that ye may be tried, and ye shall have tribulation ten days.* We see the author of all persecution is Satan; but he makes use of wicked men and bigots as his instruments, as was the case in the church of Smyrna: therefore persecutors are the tools of Satan, let their pretences be what they will. There are few things so abominable in the sight of God as persecution:—It touches our Lord in the tenderest point. While he underwent that strange process of shame and ignominy, scourging, buffeting, crowning with thorns, yea, nailing to the cross, we do not find a word of complaint uttered: he was like a lamb led to the slaughter, and like a sheep dumb before the shearers, he opened not his mouth; but when Saul was breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples, and hurrying them to prison and death, he calls from heaven, as affected in the most sensible part, *Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?* verifying what he says to his church—*He that toucheth you toucheth the apple of his eye.** Let every one who names the name of Christ stand

at the remotest distance from any thing that looks like persecution. The conscience is too tender a thing for finite creatures to meddle with, especially poor sinful mortals. We may use reason and scripture; and when we have done that, we must leave the matter to him who judgeth righteously; and not interfere with the prerogative of the Judge of all hearts. If any one under pretence of religion injures his neighbour, or the commonwealth, then he exposes himself to the correction of the law; and it is right he should be legally restrained; because we are certain that he is stepping out of his line; but when his behaviour is inoffensive, no man has any right to usurp the government of his conscience, but leave him to his own Master to stand or fall. We see our blessed Lord is most liberal in these respects: The disciples would have forbid the man even casting out devils: and why? Because he followed not with them. Did our Lord approve that narrow spirit? Ah no! it was contrary to his own gracious and generous temper. And can we follow a better example? In no wise. Invading the rights of others in religious concerns is certainly a species of persecution; and the man who does that would carry matters farther were it in his power; and I must confess, I should be sorry if either my liberty or property were in the hands of such an one.

9. But why were these pious and upright saints to be thrown into prison? Was it that they might be destroyed?

destroyed? No; but that they *might be tried*; that is, that their faith and love might be fully manifested, and their souls thoroughly purified. A finer does not put his metal into the fire that he may consume it, but only that he may separate the dross from the pure ore. The labouring husbandman does not beat his sheaves with the flail that he may bruise the corn, but that he may thresh out the bounding grain; and when that purpose is effected he lays his flail aside; and so the finer withdraws his gold from the fire when the dross is sufficiently consumed. Thus does the almighty Finer, or Refiner of precious souls: he chuses his saints in the furnace of afflictions, that they may be purified and made white; and when that end is thoroughly answered, he takes them out of the way; for he takes no delight in afflicting or grieving the children of men. All his saints have been tried more or less, and though many are their afflictions, yet the Lord delivers from them all; yea, he knows how to deliver the godly out of temptation. Look at his saints of old; the most eminent, as Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, David, Hezekiah, or those in the New Testament, and we find they were all tried, but neither forsaken nor confounded.

10. *And ye shall have tribulation ten days.* Such as make these epistles emblematical, make these ten days to refer to the ten years which the persecution raised by Trajan continued, which was
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very general and very severe, few could escape. Some make the ten days to take in all the ten general persecutions, which were during the three first centuries. But be that as it may, it undoubtedly signifies that God permitted that trial for an appointed time; and when it had answered the desired end it should cease; which is the case with every trial here upon earth; and we are assured that all things work together for good to such as love God; and that the light affliction which is but for a moment, shall work out a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.

11. He now adds an encouraging and animating exhortation—*Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.* Some refiners tell us, that we are not to be stimulated to obedience from any other motives than that of the honour of God, nor deterred from any thing that is evil from the fear of punishment; but I doubt that is over-straining the matter. It is said of Moses, that he esteemed the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt, and what motive he acted from; for it is said, that *he had respect unto the recompence of reward.* And of one greater than Moses it is said, that he endured the cross and despised the shame, *for the joy that was set before him.* If such were the encouraging motives to the servant and the Son of God, I think they are such as we need not be ashamed of. Besides, why are life and death, blessing and cursing
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set before us, but that we may chuse life and escape death? The sublime motives contended for, suit a glorified state, or the case of such as have not sinned; but we poor sinners, in houses of clay, have need of the encouraging views held out in the text. *Be thou faithful* in doing and suffering the will of God, and *I will give thee a crown of life*. Surely this is intended to encourage and stimulate, as well as various other passages in God's word. But this animating text deserves a more attentive consideration, and I shall for the present pass it by till another opportunity.

12. Those who make these churches emblematical, suppose that the church of Smyrna is a figure of the state of things from the apostolic age to the year 325, when Constantine overcame Licinius, and thereby put an end to the pagan government, and consequently all the persecution which arose from that quarter. We may suppose those times of suffering were the purest ages of Christianity; and yet such as have read the history of even that golden age, as it is called by some, can but lament the divisions and distractions which were found among such as professed Christianity. They were divided into several sects and parties, and treated each other in a very unchristian manner; which rather makes me doubt whether the opinion of these churches being emblematical, and especially this of Smyrna, of the times assigned to them. It is true, the opinion
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is perfectly innocent, and does not affect the essentials of Christianity, whether it be true or a mistake.

13. How amiable is the character of this church ! There is nothing for which it stands reprov'd, which is truly wonderful. The angel of the church of Ephesus is keenly reprov'd, and awfully threatened for leaving his first love, although there were many excellent things found in him : from hence we may infer the purity of the church in Smyrna, because here is not one single instance of reproof in any respect, either as touching doctrine, discipline, or practice, therefore it appears as if all were right ; for God will not overlook evils even in his suffering children : no ; he is a God of purity, and evil cannot stand in his sight. Even in his dearest children he will not allow sin of any kind.—If David sin, he will make him smart ; and “ if his children forsake God’s law, and walk not in his judgments ; if they break his statutes and keep not his commandments, he will visit their transgressions with a rod, and their iniquities with stripes.” But here we find a pious, poor, suffering people, blameless and unreprouceable in his sight.

14. Let us imitate these noble sufferers in the righteous cause. Very likely their fidelity might occasion their poverty ; and if so, it shews their uprightness in a most amiable light. Like Moses, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy either the pleasures or profits of sin
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for a season, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than all the treasures of the world. In the general, godliness is profitable to all things, having the promise of the life that now is, and that which is to come. But then, there may be instances wherein God may try his children for reasons best known to himself, and in those trials may cause men to ride over their heads; and herein is the patience of the saints made manifest, and their love and attachment to their Lord is disclosed to all. Example is the best kind of preaching, and as we see it verified in these poor saints, it is left on record that we may imitate them; which we may through the grace of God strengthening us. Excellent as our Lord's doctrine was, yet it would have weighed very little, if he had not left us an example to follow his steps. But he could say, *Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart*: and therefore the Apostle says, Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus; who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God; yet made himself of no reputation! Ah! could he make himself lower? Bow down, my pride! Mine honour, be thou laid in the dust! Repair, O my soul, to the manger, or lie at the foot of the cross!

15. Known unto God are all hearts, and the very secrets of the human heart, all the motives from whence we act. *I know*, says he, *the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews and are not, but are*

are the synagogue of Satan. And thus he is perfectly acquainted with us, let our profession be what it will; yea, and all the churches must know that he searches the reins and the heart.* The Psalmist cries out, Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and see what way of wickedness is in me, and lead me in the way everlasting. Our real state is just what we are in the sight of God. Whatever methods we take, to save appearances with our fellow-worms, they avail nothing before him. Hypocrisy is an evil hateful both to God and man: and what is the hope of the hypocrite, though he hath gained, when God taketh away his soul? The Almighty is said to take pleasure in uprightness; and if so, he must detest insincerity, which plainly shews us what we ought to be. That men hate or are ashamed of hypocrisy is evident by the unwillingness there is in them to be esteemed such. The greatest ruffian you meet with, reckons to despise the hypocrite. Charge him almost with what you will, and he will bear it with some degree of temper, but charge him with hypocrisy, and his indignation is raised to the highest degree of rage and madness. But alas, alas! the charge is more general than we are willing to believe. How many profess to know God, yet in works deny him! How many draw near with their lips, yet their hearts are far from God, wandering after divers vanities, and thereby mock their Maker!

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* Rev. ii, 23.

What can we call that? It is not sincerity.—Then it is insincerity, for there is no medium; and what is that but hypocrisy? The apostle says, *Let us draw near with a true, a sincere heart*; nothing less is well-pleasing to God.

16. The last thing which I shall notice from this amiable epistle is, that God is perfectly acquainted with all the troubles, crosses, and trials which his children are called to bear. Indeed they are in some degree of his own appointing; but they are appointed in-mercy, and in them we must hear him say, *Fear thou not, for I am with thee; be not afraid, I am thy God.—What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter.* If we suffer with him we shall reign with him; if we die with him, we shall live with him: therefore, let thy suffering be in character, circumstances, or person, remember, that all things work together for good to such as love God. In the general, God's people have been a poor people, and will have cause to bless his name to eternity for it. Very few of us can bear prosperity, and therefore our heavenly Father wisely keeps the luscious poison from us. It is said, the prosperity of fools will destroy them; and are you sure you are not liable to become one of those fools? Trust not thine own heart; for he that does so is a fool, and folly will be his portion. The riches of the world are far from making any one happy: that is pretty plain from what we see and hear day by day.

I reckon that person has the easiest passage through life, who is capable of supporting himself and family with comfortable necessaries, with his own hand-labour, provided it be not over-toilsome. He lays his care down with his labour, and finds that the sleep of the labouring man is sweet; whereas it often happens that the abundance of the rich will not let them sleep. But true happiness is neither in poverty nor riches, but in true contentment, and that can ever be found in having the mind of Christ. There centered the happiness of the church of Smyrna, and there we must find it. For religion is the same in all ages and in all countries, and must have the same source,—the water of life proceeding from the throne of God and the Lamb; the gracious influences of the divine spirit proceeding from the Father and the Son. Thither, my dear friends, direct all your thoughts, all your desires, so that you may find that peace which passeth all understanding, keeping your hearts and minds by Jesus Christ; so that you may be steadfast and immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, well knowing that your labour is not in vain in the Lord!

LECTURE IV.

Rev. ii. 10.

Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.

IT seems to have been a suffering season with the church of Smyrna at this time ; and it is highly probable the angel thereof was about to seal his testimony with his blood. The Lord, therefore, suits his exhortation to the present circumstances of his suffering servant, and gives him a glorious promise for his encouragement. It is certain, as our day is so shall our strength be ; and although the words of our text were originally designed to animate this angel in his present trial, yet they stand on record for our comfort and encouragement. They exactly coincide with what our Lord so often repeats, *He that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved. To him that overcometh all the temptations and snares, trials and difficulties which lie in his way, will I grant to sit with me on my throne, as I have overcome, and am set down with my Father on his throne.* So here in the text, *Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.* We

shall here drop the angel of the church at Smyrna, and apply the words to ourselves.

From hence it may be necessary to consider, **FIRST**, To whom this exhortation is given; **SECONDLY**, The exhortation itself, *Be thou faithful unto death*: **THIRDLY**, the encouraging promise, *I will give thee a crown of life*.

First, then, we are to consider the persons to whom the promise is made.

I. 1. It must be to believers; for we cannot be faithful without faith any more than we can see without eyes; and though we may not be called to die at a stake, yet we are called upon to be faithful to whatever is committed to us. If we are scriptural believers, we see, yea, and feel too, that we are by nature wretched, miserable, blind, and naked. Our understandings are amazingly darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is within us, because of the blindness of our minds. So that the natural man, however learned or regular he may be, yet, he receiveth not the things of the spirit of God; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. This was fully verified in the case of Nicodemus, and we see it exemplified daily; yea, and we feel it in our own souls, and mourn over it. Human learning is useful in its place; but it will not supply the place of heavenly and divine teaching; and the wisest have need to cry out, O, send out thy light and thy truth; let

let them lead me to thy holy hill, and to thy dwelling-place. The understanding is not only darkened, but the will of man is fallen and perverse, and quite repugnant to the will of God; this the believer is made sensible of, and has often mourned under it; yea, and it may be, still mourns under it, well knowing how hard a task it is to overcome. The combat is very serious, and calls for the exertion of all his faith and fortitude. Self-will is the root of all his corruption, the heart and soul of the old man; yea, the first-born son of rebellion. *I will be like the Most High,** said Lucifer, and immediately ceased to be an angel of light: *his place in heaven knew him no more.* This self-will is the carnal mind which is enmity against God, and is not subject to the law of God, nor can it be. No; it must be rooted out, like Amalek, it must be blotted out of the soul. It may be said of self-will as of the unclean spirit, Its name is legion; for many are the evils contained in it. What peevishness, fretfulness, and discontent does this many-headed monster occasion! What continued war does it make against God and the Lamb! against the Spirit of God! against the work of God in the soul of man! As the understanding is dark, and the will perverse, so the conscience is polluted, and full of dead works; and all the affections are in sad disorder; placed upon earthly objects, being carnal, sensual, and devilish:

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Isa. xiv. 14.

No wonder that the thoughts and imaginations are only evil, and that continually ! Now, every believer is made truly sensible of this, and from thence he groans, being burdened.

2. When distress and anguish come upon us, it is natural to seek a remedy, to seek rest in something, and frequently it is sought where it is not to be found : trade, company, pleasure, forms of godliness, systems and opinions ; and, too frequently, conscience gets lulled asleep, and the fallen soul relapses back into its former state. But then it falls short of believing ; the believer has tried these physicians, and has found them of no value ; and therefore is quite sensible that they are not the soul-satisfying good ; on the contrary, that they are only vanity and vexation of spirit. Such an one, being weary of seeking the living among the dead, is weary of spending money for that which is not bread, and labour for that which gives no satisfaction. It is true, such a soul has to make its way through life, and therefore must be in the world ; but that is not its element, it is not its treasure. *Whom have I in heaven but thee, is its language ; and there is none upon earth I desire besides thee.* Yea, he can add, *The world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.* The world finds as little satisfaction in me as I do in it.

3. But if the soul of a believer can find nothing in the world which can give it satisfaction, it succeeds

ceeds better in its application to the Lord who bought it ; and therefore turns all its desires to him in whom all fulness dwells, seeing that fulness is for wretched man. Christ Jesus gives the believer an assurance that he is his ransom, his life, peace and comfort, while he cordially embraces him as his Prophet, Priest, and King. He looks to him as his wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and his full redemption. He beholds the Lamb of God which taketh away the sins of the world. Here is a firm rock to build his hopes upon. *God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, and has committed to the believer the word of reconciliation.* Jesus is now precious to him. His name is like ointment poured forth, and therefore he loves him. His yoke is easy and his burden is light. He stakes his everlasting all upon that Rock of ages, well knowing that the gates of hell shall not prevail against him. In that blessed Saviour all the attributes sweetly harmonize, and the covenant of redemption shall stand fast for ever. The believer can cheerfully sing,

“ Blessings for ever on the Lamb,
Who bore our sin, and curse, and pain ;
Let angels sound his sacred name,
And every creature say, Amen.”

4. But we are not to suppose that the believer is to pass on his journey in perpetual triumph, without interruption : No ; as it was with the Lord so it will
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be with the servant, in some degree. A voice from heaven announced, *This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.* This was glorious indeed, and truly animating ; but what followed ? A time of heavy temptation. *Then was Jesus led up by the Spirit into the wilderness, to be tempted of the devil.** This, I apprehend, will be the case with every saint. He will not be long on the mount before he must march into the wilderness. Jehovah never had but one son, in human nature, without sin ; but he never had one grown to maturity without temptation. The lion is come up from the swelling of Jordan, and the destroyer of the Gentiles is on his way ; so that we have principalities and powers to wrestle with, and the rulers of the darkness of this world, and spiritual wickedness in high places. He is called *the old serpent* ; and that shews his amazing cunning. He is called *our adversary* ; and that shews that we are to expect no quarter from him. He is called *the angel of the bottomless pit, the god of this world* ; which terms plainly shew his amazing power. *He is called a roaring lion, continually going about seeking whom he may devour* ; which shews his restless activity. He deceived and drew from their allegiance the third part of angels, called stars ; and deceived our first parents in paradise ; also Judas in the school of Christ ; and can we think he will let

* Mat. iii. & iv.

the children of God go free, in whom there is too much of fallen nature existing? No; we must know the wiles of Satan; we must not be ignorant of his devices; we cannot escape them if we are. It is good to know where and how the snare is laid, that we may avoid the same. Wherever the image of God is forming, he is sure to strike at it, and de-face it, if possible. There is no state, office, or place, but the grand enemy can square his temptations so as to meet it. In company or alone, in high life, or in a low estate; so that there is always need to attend to that exhortation, *Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation.*

5. The believer is born from above—born of the Spirit; is passed from death unto life. His faith works by love, or it is not the faith which is of the divine operation; it is a mere dead faith, and no better than that of a devil, and consequently will not justify the ungodly. But the true believer is renewed in the spirit of his mind; he was dead, but he has heard the voice of the Son of God, and in hearing he lives. Where sin did abound, grace doth much more abound. Sin did reign, even unto death; but grace now reigns unto eternal life, thro' an all-conquering Saviour. Being in *Christ Jesus*, he is a new creature: old things are passed away, and all things are become new. Thus he finds the kingdom of God is not in word only, but in power, power over himself, the world, and the hellish fiend.

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Happy change! blessed transformation! There is, therefore, now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. Such an one can say, *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath begotten us again to a lively hope by the resurrection from the dead to an inheritance that is incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away.** Such is the character of the person to whom the exhortation in the text is given.

II. Let us inquire into the import of the exhortation, that is fidelity; *Be thou faithful unto death.* It has been observed, that the party addressed has faith, or it would be in vain to exhort them to be faithful.

1. Such an one is called to be faithful in doing the will of God, both with regard to things temporal and eternal; and more especially in the time of prosperity. He is called to be faithful in every relation and connexion in which Providence has placed him; in every domestic concern, let it be husband or wife, let it be parent or child, let it be servant or master. We see how strictly this was attended to by Abraham,† Job,‡ David,§ and various other great characters which we read of. The Apostle Paul is very express in these matters,§ and so is Peter; ** giving to each their proper portion in due

* 1 Pet. 3, 4. † Gen. xviii. 19. ‡ Job xxxi. 13. § Psalm ci.
§ Eph. v. 6, Col. iii. 4. ** 1 Pet. iii.

due season. Nay, it is said that, Moses was faithful in all his house, and we are sure it was a large house, and a very troublesome house, which gave him no small concern; as is the case with every one who has any considerable number of mankind to deal with. Indeed, the duty of faithfulness is of great extent, if we duly consider it as relating to our Maker, our neighbour, and ourselves. It regards our property, capacity, and all the opportunities which we have in human life. It takes in our grace, learning, and knowledge, and the degree of each. Where there are five talents, the improvement of five talents will be required; for where much is given much is required. We are in all these cases but stewards; and it is expected of the steward that he should be faithful, or how can he expect to hear in the last day that blessed sentence, *Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord!* This doing the will of God relates both to preachers and hearers; and is certainly of very great extent, taking in the whole compass of their actions both to God and man, for time and eternity.

2. But if we are to be faithful in doing, undoubtedly we must be so in suffering the will of God; and it is very likely we shall find suffering the harder work. There will arise afflictions to the children of God common with the rest of mankind. They are in the body, and as such must feel pain and sickness, crosses and disappointments in our families, in our connections

connections, in our characters, and in various respects; for man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward: this must unavoidably be the case with every description of mankind: no rank or station, connexion or place, can plead an exemption from tribulation; it is a fruit of the forbidden tree, and therefore the present life is a vale of tears, a howling wilderness, a region of sorrows, a land of disappointments; in short, it is *the valley of the shadow of death*. We commonly call it the land of the living, but it is, actually, the land of the dying. Every thing is in a state of revolution; the seasons, vegetables, rivers, creatures of all descriptions; states, kingdoms, families, and circumstances; in short, all creation is travailing in painful agonies till its great deliverance shall arrive. In all this it is a blessed thing to be faithful, so that we may not murmur or repine, or charge God foolishly.

Moreover, the saints must not expect to pass through the dominions of the god of this world without persecution; for of old, he that was born after the flesh did persecute him that was born after the spirit; and we must expect it will be so still. In this sense it is that our Lord says, *In the world ye shall have tribulation*;* and again, *We must through much tribulation enter the kingdom of God*;† and inspiration hath assured us, that *all who will live godly in Christ Jesus, must suffer persecution*.‡ It has been observed, that it was

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* John xvi. 33. † Acts xiv. 22. ‡ 2 Tim. iii. 12.

a time of persecution with the church of Smyrna, and it is very probable, the angel, the minister of that church, was about to lay down his life in the divine cause; and hence it is that the Lord gives them this sweet encouragement—*Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days. Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.* In reference to this, our Lord says, *Suppose ye that I am come to send peace on the earth? Nay, but rather a division.* That is, through the corruption that is in human nature, and the enmity that is in fallen man against me, unavoidable contentions will arise, and break thro' all the ties of nature; the ungodly father will persecute his godly son, and the ungodly son will rise up against his righteous father; insomuch that the prophet's words shall be verified, *A man's foes shall be they of his own household.** Nor does it matter by what names men are called; if they are in the flesh, if they are unconverted, they will persecute the saints. Herein we are called to be faithful; yea, to endure hardship, as good soldiers of Jesus Christ; so shall we be more than conquerors. But the afflictions of the Christian do not terminate here; they are not only men of like passions with others, and therefore have their trials in the general, and

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* Micah vii. 6. Mat. x. 35.

persecutions peculiar to themselves as the children of God in particular ; but they have principalities and powers to grapple with, the rulers of the darkness of this world, and spiritual wickedness in high places. There are two points which Satan drives at ; one is to allure to sin ; and here he plays his old game over again by the subtilty of deceiving, and acting the cunning serpent. In this manner, I am apprehensive, he seduced the angels who fell ; and in this guise he beguiled Eve through his subtilty, and thus he deceives the whole world.* There is no state of grace, there is no rank or station in life, time or place, but he will try his skill. If he prevailed with the angels in heaven, Eve in paradise, and Judas in the school of Christ, who are safe ? Truly, only such as are kept by the mighty power of God ; such as abide in the strong tower, the city of refuge, the true vine. There they are safe, seeing none can pluck them out of their Saviour's hand. Let the tempter come with a bough of the most tempting forbidden fruit, yet they can bid defiance ; they can see the snare, and it is said to be set in vain in the sight of any bird. It is a blessing not to be ignorant of Satan's devices. But if the serpent will not answer his purpose, he will commence the roaring lion, or assume the dragon, and will try to shake our confidence. While he was playing the fox, God was represented as all mercy and indulgence, a mere

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* 2-Cor. xi. 2. Rev. xx.

deistical God, or an antinomian Deity ; but now having varied his mode of attack, he is painted to the imagination inexorable justice ; yea, all vengeance and fury : standing with flaming eyes and the glittering sword, just ready to execute the judgment which the sinner deserves. While the adversary was playing the charmer, he was very ready in bringing promises from the Bible and applying them, as he was with our Lord ;* but now the book of God is like St. Paul's voyage to Rome, when for many days neither sun nor star appeared ;† not a promise nor a cheering passage is to be seen, and all hope of being saved is taken away. Before he was taken up on mount Pisgah, and all was delight ; but now he is ever under the burning mount, from whence issue dreadful flashes of fire, loud peals of thunder, and the sound of a trumpet waxing louder and louder, while the soul is enveloped in darkness which may be felt ; and the insulting foe coming through the murky gloom, roaring, Where is thy God ? In such a juncture, the poor tossed soul looks forward into his word, but cannot see him ; backward at past experience, but can discover nothing ; on the right hand and the left, where he works with others, but still she cannot discover him.‡ O, the wind blows, the storm rages, and the waves beat high, and it may be the fourth watch of the night before the stiller of the tempest appears ; so that the poor soul reels to

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and

* Mat. iv. 6. † Acts xxvii. 20. ‡ Job xxiii. 8, 9, 10.

and fro, staggers like a drunken man, and is at its wits end: its cry is, *The sorrows of death compass me, and the pains of hell get hold on me; yea, I find trouble and sorrow: O Lord, I beseech thee deliver my soul!** Now, tried soul, be of good cheer; for though the enemy come in like a flood, the Spirit of God will lift up a standard against him: he will check the fury of the oppressor, though he be ready to devour. Satan cannot go an inch beyond his limits, as we see in the case of Job,† and various others of God's servants, who have finished triumphantly their warfare. Hear, thou tempted soul, what thy Lord says: *Fear thou not, for I am with thee; be not dismayed, for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.*‡ No weapon formed against thee shall prosper; and every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord, let them live in what age or country soever they may, and their righteousness is of me, saith the Lord.§—Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee.¶ God will not always contend for ever, neither will he be always wroth; lest the soul should fail before him, and the spirit which he hath made.—Courage

* Psa. cxvii. 3.

† Job i. x.

‡ Isa. xli. 10.

§ Isa. liv. 17.

¶ Isa. lx. 1.

erage; then, thou struggling soul! thy Saviour's *grace* is *sufficient for thee*.* Be thou faithful in performing thy part; and thou shalt assuredly obtain the immortal prize.

3. We must observe the duration of this fidelity, till *death*. It is not a temporary conflict: the war must last till the victory be obtained; the race must be continued till you reach the goal. Do not think of putting off your armour till you put off the body. He that endureth to the end the same shall be saved. The just shall live by faith; but if he draw back, my soul, says God, shall have no pleasure in him. The righteous must hold on his way; and he that hath clean hands must wax stronger and stronger. But, remember how many Israelites left Egypt, and how few entered the promised land. Their carcases fell in the wilderness through unbelief; and they are held up as an awful warning, to the end, that if we think we stand, we must take heed lest we fall. Therefore, be not weary in well doing, for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not: for, says our Lord, *Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life*.

III. 1. Let us now consider this glorious and encouraging promise, *A crown of life*! How different is this from the perishing bawbles which the princes of this world contend for! which often prove to them a crown of thorns; but this is a crown of glory,

glory, a crown of righteousness, an incorruptible crown, that fadeth not away. But what is implied in this crown of life? Indeed it is not easy to give a proper answer; for eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. The joys and happiness of heaven generally run in negatives, as the exemption from pain, sickness, sorrows, and tears. A few things we may venture to declare: 1. A deliverance from a weak and frail body. It is called an earthly tabernacle: it is formed from the earth, and it is supported from the earth: it may be said to stand upon earthen pillars, and must return to the earth again. Man is of the earth, earthy; being dust, he must return to the dust again. In the mean time, it is an inconvenience, a heavy weight to the soul: its various calls, wants, and infirmities, are many, and is seldom free from complaints; the springs are continually relaxing, and therefore must be daily wound up with food and sleep, or all must sink. It is like a ruinous habitation, which is often letting the weather in, and proves very troublesome to the inhabitant. But the crown of life will be a complete deliverance from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the sons of God. The Apostle could say, *We who are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality may be swallowed up.*

*lowed up of life.** What care and toil does this animated piece of dust require ! Awfully fulfilled indeed is that threatening, *In the sweat of thy brow shalt thou eat bread all the days of thy life, until thou return to dust again.* Being born in sin, we create trouble and pain to our mothers ; so true has the threatening come to pass upon the first woman—*In sorrow shalt thou bring forth children.* But all this incumbrance shall be laid aside when once we receive a crown of life. The fleshly load shall be laid down to refine in dust till the resurrection of the just, when it shall be raised an incorruptible and glorious body, like unto the glorified body of our Lord; when mortality shall be swallowed up in endless life.

2. With a deliverance from a weak and frail body will be that from all the afflictions of the present life. They are exceeding numerous both of body and mind. *Man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble.* Being born in sin, he is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward. Business is often very perplexing, especially to the man who desires to keep a conscience void of offence. There are many quibbles and turns which a man of the world can yield to; but a Christian must obey the voice of God both in his own conscience, and in his sacred word; and this for a time may make his path rugged, and put him to many great inconveniences, and

and thereby prove no small cross. Had David yielded to worldly counsel, when he had Saul in his power several times, he might have rid himself of his vindictive and restless troubler: but it was counsel which he could not comply with.* He would not avenge himself, but rather gave place to wrath, well knowing that vengeance belongeth unto the Lord, and was firmly persuaded that he would repay.† He that believeth must not make haste, he must not run before his guide; if he does, he will stumble and fall. All trials are as a purging fire, and will only consume the dross, in order that the believer may come forth a pure vessel, fitted for the great Master's use; There he waits till the storm of life is over, and then he shall be taken into the peaceful harbour of everlasting repose.

" 'Tis there he'll bathe his weary soul

In seas of endless rest;

And not a wave of trouble roll

Across his peaceful breast!"

Let his afflictions be national, commercial, domestic, or personal, they will all terminate well; it shall be well with the righteous; for, though many are his troubles, yet God will deliver him out of them all.

3. This crown of life delivers the faithful soul from all the temptations of Satan. While he is passing through an enemy's country he must expect to be-

* 1 Sam. xxiv. Chap. xxvi. 8, 9. † 1 Sam. xxvi. 10. Rom. xii. 19.

be molested. The prince of darkness is not willing to lose his subjects, and their very first cry to God alarms him. God never had but one son, we have said, in human flesh, without sin, but he never had one without temptation. The man Christ Jesus was not without temptation; and every temptation is either painful or dangerous. We have already observed, that the great enemy is labouring either to allure into sin, or frighten the soul into doubts and fears, the consequence of unbelief. It is no small comfort that we have an High Priest who is touched with a sympathy of our infirmities, being tempted in all points like us, yet without sin; and does not only sympathize with us, but will make a way for our escape, so that we may be able to bear it while it lasts, and in the end there will be a final deliverance. Here we are molested, by evil thoughts being suggested; for as the devil put it into the heart of Judas to betray the Lord of glory;* so there is no doubt but most, if not all, evil thoughts are suggested by the same enemy, or his associates, and often times they prove exceeding troublesome, and occasion many a conflict; but even here, we may be more than conquerors through him that loved us, and in the end finally triumphant; yea we may overcome through the blood of the Lamb,† this will not be a truce, a mere suspension of arms, but a final victory, an entire, an everlasting conquest. For

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* John xiii. 2.

† Rev. xii. 11.

the ransomed of the Lord shall return to Zion with songs, and everlasting joy upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.† O ravishing thought! transporting view! when the accuser of the brethren shall be finally cast down,‡ never to molest them any more, when they shall never be buffeted again, their warfare being eternally ended, and their tears for ever wiped away! Courage then my fellow soldiers! our Captain will not fail us, we shall fully triumph, and make the heavenly arches ring with shouts of victory to GOD and the LAMB for ever!

4. The crown of life will exclude all the persecutions of ungodly men. From the death of Abel to the present time, all that are truly on the Lord's side have and must suffer persecution. He that was born after the flesh did persecute him that was born after the Spirit; and so it is still, that is a part of the believer's cross, and more or less he must be content to bear it till his Lord signs his dismissal. I judge the promise in the text particularly intended to encourage such, and let them contemplate the words of the poet,

Who bear thy cross, shall wear thy crown,

Shall triumph in thy victory;

And in thy glorious throne sit down

And reign in endless bliss with thee.

Let the suffering members of Jesus remember,
what

† Isa. xxxv. 10.

‡ Rev. xii. 10.

what he has said, *Whosoever shall confess me before men, him will I confess before my Father which is in heaven. In the world ye shall have tribulation. Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world. We must through much tribulation enter the kingdom of God.* A very great multitude which no man can number have already entered into the joy of their Lord; but they came out of great tribulation, and washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them, they shall hunger no more, which had often been their case here below, neither thirst any more, neither shall the sun of affliction light on them, nor the heat of persecution. For the Lamb, which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and lead them to fountains of living waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.* How tender and soothing is the last expression, *God shall wipe away tears from their eyes!* Then they shall never weep more; they have no more the trials of cruel mockings, or bonds or imprisonments. No more reproaches shall be cast upon them, their names stand without a blot in the book of life. They are no longer watched over for evil, no more reviled and scorned; the company which they are admitted among is such as will never reproach them, or be a snare to others; for they

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* Rev. vii. 14—17.

are the spirits of just men made perfect. Having suffered with their Lord they shall reign with him. O yes, suffering believer, *In righteousness shalt thou be established: thou shalt be far from oppression, for thou shalt not fear.** There, in the most literal sense, *the wicked cease from troubling, and there the weary be at rest, they hear not the voice of the oppressor.†* I believe there is nothing which the Almighty detests so much as persecution, nor is it at all desirable, yet it sometimes proves a winnowing fan to drive the chaff away; or as refining fire to purify the saints; but now their probationary days being over, they have no need of either one or the other. They have no dross to purge away, nor any hypocrites to drive from among them. They have been proved and tried, and made white, and are vessels fitted for the Great Master's use.

5. Having overcome, they have obtained a final conquest over death and hell, having passed through the valley of the shadow of death they have it not to repass a second time. It is true, their bodies are yet in ruins, seeing they are in the dust; but they rest in hope of a glorious immortality. As Christ, the first fruits is risen, so they that are Christ's shall rise from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the sons of GOD, namely such as are already risen. For as many of the saints did rise from the dead, when our blessed Lord rose,‡ so I judge that many,

* Isa liv. 14. † Job iii. 16, 17. ‡ Matt. xxvii 52, 53.

many, (perhaps all the martyrs) will rise in the millennium;* and in due time all his saints shall rise, and their glorified souls shall be reunited to their glorified bodies again. That ancient prophecy shall be fulfilled, *thy dead men shall live, together with my dead body shall they arise; awake and sing ye that dwell in dust; for thy dew shall be as the dew of herbs.*† Also that divine prophecy in Hosea, *I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death: O death I will be thy plague: O grave, I will be thy destruction.*‡

It is the opinion of some, that when GOD created our first parents, he enshrined them in a luminous vehicle, expressive of his own image, but when they sinned they lost that heavenly covering, and found themselves naked; but that the spirits of just men made perfect, shall receive their glorified bodies arrayed in that heavenly attire, so that they shall not be found naked. And I know not but the Apostle may refer to this, where he says, *In this (body) we groan earnestly, desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven, which the GOD of heaven will mercifully restore to us again: if so that being clothed we shall not be found naked. For we that are in this tabernacle do groan being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life.*§ It is true,

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* Rev. xx. 4.

† Isa. xxvi. 19.

‡ Hosea xiii. 12.

§ 2 Cor. v. 2, 3, 4.

*It is sown in corruption; but it shall be raised in incorruption: it is sown in dishonour, it shall be raised in glory: it is sown a natural body, it shall be raised a spiritual body.** Glorious change! wrought by the mighty power of our all-conquering Immanuel, *who shall change our vile bodies that they be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able to subdue all things to himself.†*

6. In the possession of this crown of righteousness is full enjoyment of eternal happiness, either in ourselves, the company we shall be admitted into, or what must crown all, the glorious object of our highest praises, namely, our ever blessed Ransomer, in whom the fullness of the Godhead dwells bodily; in whom every attribute of the Deity unites, and will shine with increasing lustre through the countless ages of eternity. Even heaven would be clad in mourning were it possible for Jesus to withdraw his sacred presence. When the beloved disciple was in the visions of GOD, and was translated into the third heavens, he observes that, *the city has no need of the sun, neither the moon to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb was the light thereof.‡* The wonders of redeeming grace will appear in a manner of which we have now no conception. Nay, our views even of creation and providence are now much contracted; we know but
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* 1 Cor. xv. 42, 43, 44.

† Phil. iii. 21.

‡ Rev. xvi. 23.

in part, even a very small part, but then that which is perfect being come, that which is in part shall be done away. I apprehend, the glorified infant will know more of the sublime works of Providence and creation, than the profoundest philosopher was ever able to discover while in the present body of flesh. But, though they will sing the song of Moses, namely, the works of creation, yet the song of the Lamb will raise their highest notes; even angels join in that grand chorus; in this "all voices must join melodious part, such concord is in heaven."

"Now the full glories of the Lamb
Adorn the heavenly plains;
Bright Seraphs learn Immanuel's name,
And try their choicest strains."

O the triumphs of the cross! the victory obtained through the hard travail of his righteous soul, who was wounded for our transgression, and bruised for our iniquity, will engage all eyes, and all voices. The Apostle John leads his readers as it were under the very walls of paradise, within the very songs and sounds of the glorified. Read over Revelations the 5th, from the 6th verse to the end.

They who love him view his glory
Shining in his bruised face,
His dear person on the rainbow,
Now his people's head shall raise.
Hallelujah, &c. &c.
Welcome, welcome bleeding Lamb.

O, the sweet combination of every thing that is truly great and good! what raptures must that create! Satan for ever conquered! the world finally overcome! Death destroyed, and danger no more! the body raised from its ruins, made like its living head! Joined to its glorified spirit, never to return to its infirmities and weaknesses again! And to crown all, to bask in the immediate beams of the reconciled Godhead through the adorable medium of a Mediator in my nature, who having abolished death, hath brought life and immortality to light through the everlasting gospel. Well might angels sing, *Glory to God in the highest; and on earth peace and goodwill to men.** O my soul, why dost thou cleave to any of the sordid objects of time and sense! Why art thou not for ever on stretch to obtain a kingdom that cannot be shaken, that exists for ever! Why art thou not forgetting the things which are behind, and eagerly pressing to the mark for the prize of the high calling?

From what has been said, we may first observe, that now is the time of trial; this is our warfare, and most likely will last to the end of our days. We cannot shake off a feeble, diseased body, nor must we attempt to give the afflictions of human life the slip; nor is there any charming them away; God has permitted them for many wise and valuable ends, into which we cannot see or know at the present;
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* Luke ii. 14.

but we shall know hereafter. Satan also will assault the faithful, this he is permitted to do, that our faith, love and patience may be tried, and in the end come off more than conquerors. In the meantime, hear the word of exhortation. *Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit yourselves like men, be strong.* Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.† Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about seeking whom he may devour.‡* Remember how the ancient worthies acquitted themselves, *who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens.§*

But, lastly, let us remember no one goes a warfare at his own cost: nor does our Lord require impossibilities: no, as our day is our strength shall be; that so each may say, “I can do all things thro’ Christ strengthening me.” Art thou in temptation? He will make a way for thee to escape. No weapons formed against thee shall prosper. His grace shall be sufficient for thee. Art thou in affliction? The afflictions of the present time, which are but

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* 1 Cor. xvi. 13.

† Eph. vi. 11.

‡ 1 Pet. v. 8.

§ Heb. xi. 33, 34.

for a moment, shall work out for thee an exceeding, and eternal weight of glory. In all thy affliction thy Lord is afflicted, and the angel of his presence shall save thee, while all things shall work for thy good: Dost thou feel thy frail body press thee down? He will strengthen thee by his Spirit's might in the inner man, so that though the outward man decay, the inner man shall be renewed day by day. Look up, even now, for help, for it is near thee. Therefore be not weary in well doing, and in due season thou shalt reap if thou faint not.

LECTURE

LECTURE V.

REV. ii. 12—18.

And to the angel of the church in Pergamos, write ; These things saith he, which hath the sharp sword with two edges. I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, even where Satan's seat is : and thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith, even in those days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth. But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to cast a stumbling-block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication. So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes, which thing I hate. Repent ; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches, To him that overcometh, will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth, saving he that receiveth it.

PERGAMOS

PERGAMOS was about 64 miles from Smyrna. By whom the gospel was planted there we cannot tell, as this is the only place in scripture where it is named. It has a good character upon the whole, though there were some things amiss. Indeed it is a very difficult matter to keep every thing right in the church of GOD, especially at some seasons; and how to act is not easy to tell. Preaching is a very small part of a minister's care, although it is a very important matter; yet the keeping up a proper discipline requires much more prudence, patience and resolution, than that of composing and delivering sermons. Sermons in the general, are more calculated for those that are without; but good discipline to such as are within the pale of the church. Christian discipline is of essential use, nor can a church thrive without it. To keep the church tolerably pure in doctrine and practice is a very difficult matter, and as such requires the wisdom which is from above, and great steadiness; and to do this a minister must be no time server, he must bear reproach and lose the favour of his friends, and perhaps must have his name cast out as evil, and be contented to have every possible advantage taken against him; will be traduced and represented in an unfavorable light, and his character and usefulness often undermined, which certainly must be a trying circumstance to a sincere minister of Christ.

Thos.

The character of the angel of this church is upon the whole a good one ; but it was a suffering season with him, and the Lord highly commends his fortitude and stability in his present trying circumstances ; yet, even here, we find something reprovabie, and which the Lord will not wink at, but demands a reformation. I shall here take notice of the preface, the body of the Letter, and the conclusion.

I. 1. *To the angel, the chief minister, of the church in Pergamos, write these things.* The eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and that in more senses than one. He is ever attentive to our conduct as well as our wants, and that is a circumstance we should never lose sight of ; seeing, as stewards, we must be accountable to our Master ; so that in due time we may give up our accounts with some degree of comfort. But though the letter is addressed to the angel, yet the contents were not of private interpretation, it was for the edification of the whole church, either in the way of comfort or correction.

Write these things saith he which hath the sharp sword with two edges. It is thought that every title, or character, which our Lord assumes is suited to the state of the angel or churches to whom he writes ; and as there were persons in this church who held corrupt doctrines, and very likely were diffusing these abroad, the title conveys a threaten-
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ing idea, to intimate that, if the minister should spare them the Master would not; if they were turbulent and head-strong, and had a party to abet them, so that they were too hard for the servant; his Lord had a sharp sword, yea, a two-edged sword, which he would make them feel. This two-edged sword cut every way, either backward or forward, so that there is no escaping. *The word of God is quick and powerful, sharper than a two-edged sword*;* and if it is not slaying our old man, cutting down our lusts and passions, it is preparing us as fit fuel for everlasting burnings. It is either the savour of life unto life, or of death unto death;† that is, it either hardens or softens, according to the state of the mind which receives it; as the same sun which softens wax will harden clay: the same influences which produce verdure in a living branch increase corruption in a dead flock. But the Lord has another sword, with which he will attack the incorrigible, and with which he awfully threatens them, and that is, his vindictive justice. *If I whet my glittering sword, says Jehovah, and mine hand take hold on judgment, I will render vengeance to mine enemies*;‡ that is, I will inflict heavy calamities upon them here, and eternal vengeance hereafter. Indeed the axe is laid at the root of the tree, and the awful feller is preparing to strike the blow. *The Lord shall go forth as a mighty man, he shall stir up jealousy*.

* Heb. iv. 12.

† 2 Cor. ii. 16.

‡ Deut. xxxii. 41.

*lousy like a man of war : he shall cry, yea roar ; he shall prevail against his enemies.** Let every despiser of the truth take the awful warning, seeing the Almighty beareth not the sword in vain.

2. We come now to the body of the epistle. *I know thy works.* This is what no man can say ; and therefore men cannot form an exact judgment in every thing, and indeed, in but few things, seeing they cannot judge but by appearance. But the Lord judgeth not by the seeing of the eye, nor after the hearing of the ear ; that is, not as poor short-sighted men judge, but his judgment is according to truth. There are many who will condemn a faithful minister for doing his duty ; but God sees from what motives he acts, and the difficulties which he finds in acting his part, and will not condemn him, though he may be, and often is, censured by men ; yea, by good men, who may be mistaken for a time, and may join the general cry. Job drank deep of this cup of sorrow, and bitter it was to his taste ; and yet his censorious friends were, upon the whole, good men, though to him they were *physicians of no value.*

This church was in a critical station, even *where Satan had his seat.* I doubt Satan has more seats than one. There are few cities, towns, or villages where Satan has not his seat ; nay, his seat is in every carnal heart. He is the strong man armed, and

* Isa. xlii. 13.

and keepeth his palace till the stronger disarm him, and spoil his house. However, the situation of the church in Pergamos was where persecution was very hot. The Roman empire was very extensive, and divided into different provinces, and every province had its governor: some of these governors were candid, sensible men, and did not put the sanguinary laws rigorously into execution, remembering their own adage, *Summun jus, summum injuria*—The highest, or utmost rigour of justice, is the highest degree of injustice. But where the governors were bigotted pagans, or brutal men, or wished to pay their court to bigotted, persecuting emperors, it went ill with the poor saints; they felt the weight of the persecutor's vengeance; and as it was in vain to look for any kind of redress, they could only commit their cause to him who judgeth righteously, and patiently suffer till the Lord opened the way for them to escape. This, I presume, was the case with the church at Pergamos at this time; and hence it might be said to be the seat of Satan. Besides, error had crept in among them, and errors of a dangerous kind; even such as affected the morals of the people, opening the door to licentiousness, as we shall by and by observe: and in this respect Satan might be said to have his seat there.

HOWEVER, we find an excellent character given to this angel: *Thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith, even in those days wherein*
Antipas

Antipas was my faithful martyr among you, where Satan has his seat. High commendation indeed ! To hold fast the doctrine of the Lord in such stormy days as were in that place was no easy matter : and that is what we may understand by the name of Christ. His name had been, and still was, a terror to the prince of hell : great things have been attributed to his name, and therefore no wonder that it should be so obnoxious to the devil, and all his savage tools of tyranny. Hence the Proconsul called out to Polycarp, “ Deny Christ, blaspheme Christ, and I will release thee.” And most likely the angel under consideration might have a temptation of this sort to combat with ; yet he stood in the trying hour, and was not moved from his steadfastness. His practice, therefore, corresponded with his faith. *He did not profess to know God, and in works deny him ; but he endured hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ ;* neither won by smiles, nor awed by frowns, to deny the Lord who bought him ; he was valiant in the faith, and warred a good warfare, being determined to lay hold on eternal life. The Lord marks out a particular season of trial wherein this angel had stood fast ; namely, *in those days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth.* Who, or what this Antipas was, whether a minister or private Christian, we know not ; history is silent concerning him ; but he was in the book of God’s remembrance

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brance a precious jewel, and his name will be handed down with honour to the latest posterity. He was a martyr, that is, a witness to the truth, and was undoubtedly well known to the angel under consideration; and however his name and circumstances may have been forgotten among men, he and all the righteous sufferers shall be had in everlasting remembrance. There are many precious souls, either owing to their modesty and bashfulness, or some other circumstances, little noticed among their brethren, "yet prized and loved by God alone." To be great in the sight of the Lord is true greatness, and let each of us aspire after that alone.

Those who make these churches prophetic or emblematical, give the same turn to this Antipas, and therefore do not look upon it as the name of an individual, but that of a noble army of martyrs, and therefore take a little liberty in thinking it should be Antipapa, against the Pope, and therefore make him the emblem of such as resisted the Pope. But however figurative these churches may be deemed, yet there is not the least doubt but they were real churches, and the letters sent to them were real letters, and the persons therein described were real persons; and therefore great care must be taken least we allegorize the sense away. If we pay a strict grammatical attention to the name, it consists of two Greek words, which signify one that is against every one. *Anti*, against, and *pas*, which is all or every

every one. But, it was a common Greek name, and whatever other meaning it may have, it marks out one identical person.

Thus far the epistle runs high in the favour of this angel; but now the stile changes a little, and he is accused of being too negligent in point of discipline. *But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to cast a stumbling-block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit fornication.* The case of Balaam we read in Numbers 22, 23, 24, 25 chapters. Concerning his teaching Balak we have a pretty large account in those chapters, and from thence he is called by St. Peter, *A mad prophet, who loved the wages of iniquity.* He sought by every means to curse the Israelites, but could not. As to his teaching them to commit fornication, there is no doubt but he did so, or it would not have been objected to him; but in what manner it was we are not told, except we allow of what Josephus and other Jewish writers say: namely, that he advised the Moabites to try to allure the Israelites with their women, by which they were first drawn to commit fornication, and then idolatry; and that he suggested that would be the most likely way of overcoming them: for in that case God would forsake them, and thereby they would be easily overcome. If that was the case, as very likely it was, his counsel proved very

pernicious to the Israelites, as well as to the Midianites, and destructive to himself; for he was slain among them.* It seems the two capital evils were fornication and things offered to idols; both were abomination in the sight of a Holy God, and what the church of Pergamos might very likely practice before their conversion to christianity. Fornication among the heathen, was so far from being reputed a crime, that it constituted one of their religious rites; an evil so incident to human nature would need few arguments to stimulate them to it, especially if they had lost their first love. The retaining that first love is a blessed preservative against every evil. The angel is here blamed for tolerating such principles, as very likely they were eager to propagate them, and of course they would lead to infamous practices. Christian discipline is what the ministers of Christ are particularly intrusted with, and ought to be very careful in its execution. Licentious principles, no doubt, lean to licentious practices; and must therefore be guarded against with all due care. Indeed it is one principal end in forming christian churches, and setting up gospel discipline, that erroneous principles and unholy practices may be prevented; and it appears from these epistles, and other parts of the New Testament, that the powers of church discipline, called by our Saviour *the keys of the kingdom*.† Are committed

* Num. xxxi. 8.

† Matt. xvi. 19.

mitted to the ministers, or they would not be so threatened in case of failing in the executing their trust herein. There were such as held the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes, which was observed in the epistle to the Ephesians to be the same with the doctrine of Balaam, with this addition, they held the lawfulness of a community of wives, and very likely other abominable doctrines which have not reached our times.

The great head of the church gives him now a solemn warning, that he might warn others; *Repent, or I will come to thee quickly, and will fight against them*, namely such as held the abominable doctrines complained of, *with the sword of my mouth*. The meaning is, if those detestable principles and practices were not reformed, he would take the matter into his own hands, and instead of censures he would inflict judgments, the judgments which he had threatened with his mouth. As Jehovah declares in another place, *I will come near to you in judgment; and I will be a swift witness against the adulterers, and against such as oppress the hireling in his wages, the widow and the fatherless, and turn aside the stranger from his right, and fear not me, saith the Lord of hosts.** This is an awful sentence, and ought to make every secret sinner tremble to think, that if there is no other evidence God himself will be a swift witness; and

conscience will not be silent upon such an awful occasion, and two such witnesses, as an all-seeing God and the sinner's conscience, cannot be withstood; so in the text, *I will come unto thee quickly*, is an awful threatening, yea and a speedy one too; and the only way for any offender to prevent it must be by putting away the evil, the genuine proof of repentance; for he or she that confesseth and forsaketh sin shall obtain mercy.

III. 1. He now gives the general admonition, *He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches*, yea, to the church at Pergamos, and to all in the like situation. For we have observed these letters are not of any private interpretation; but are left on record as the last will and testament of our ever blessed Lord; so that the doctrines, promises, threatenings, cautions and admonitions, are all of use to his ministers, for the good of his body the church, till he shall come in his millennial glory; and then, I apprehend, they shall be needed no longer; because they will no longer need to teach every man his neighbour; for all shall know him from the least to the greatest. Meanwhile, let every one take heed how they hear, and how they read; so that they may take their own portion as their state may require.

2. We have now the promise made to the overcomer, namely, *to eat of the hidden manna, and a white stone given, and a new name in it which*
none

none knows, but he that receiveth it. By the hidden manna some think the allusion is taken from the state in which the manna was found in the wilderness; it was covered in the morning with dew, and when the dew was gone the manna appeared, which was hidden before.* The Jews furnish us with a variety of conceits respecting this manna; and among the rest, that whatever taste was pleasing to the palate of any one the manna assumed that taste. But by the hidden manna, I rather take it to refer to that which was hidden in the golden pot, or urn,† and which was deposited in the Holy of Holies, and which they carried into the promised land; and I suppose was laid up in the temple, and most likely remained there till the temple was taken by the Chaldeans and burnt with fire; and was most likely destroyed, for we hear no more of it. But what may the manna in the promise signify? Undoubtedly whatever it may mean besides, it points out the full enjoyment of Christ and the fulness which is in him. Hear what he says, *I am the bread of life. Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness and are dead. This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread he shall live for ever: and the bread which I give is my flesh,*
which

* Exod. xvi. 13, 14. † Ver. 32, 33. Heb. ix. 4.

*which I give for the life of the world.** The Apostle informs us, that the Israelites did all eat of that spiritual bread, that is, it had a spiritual meaning, and as the water of the rock did refer to Christ, so undoubtedly did the manna; and so we must understand the word in the text. It may refer to the love of God, which is hidden in the soul of a believer, which indeed is the great secret of the Lord with them that fear him. It may refer to those unknown and hidden joys which are at God's right hand. The white stone is spoken of in allusion to the manner in which sentence was given in courts of justice. The vote for condemnation was by casting a black stone into the urn; acquittance by giving a white one; and thereby is signified our final justification. For as we must undergo a future and final trial, so we must have a future and final sentence either of justification, or condemnation. The new name no doubt is intended to signify the lasting honour which God is sure to put upon his saints, even all who shall finally overcome. But this text demands a more explicit consideration, which I mean to give it, and for the present shall pass it by.

3. We see that God will not pass over the failings of his suffering children. No, wherever iniquity is found it must be reprov'd, and if not removed it must be punished; this should make us exceeding wary, watchful, and circumspect, lest any lurking evil

* John vi. 48, 49, 50, 51.

evil should lie concealed from us. Many are the devices of our enemy, who will never let an occasion slip of ensnaring the unwary; so needful is that exhortation so often repeated by our Lord, *What I say unto one I say unto all, watch.*

4. How early did the most abominable errors creep into the christian church? even while under the rod of persecution? One would wonder what should induce persons to make a profession of christianity while they could live in such abominations. It is true, that sacrificing to idols would screen them in many instances, seeing that was the Shiboleth of the times; but still the name of christianity was held in detestation by the heathen priests, seeing it struck directly at their craft, as we see in several places in the acts of the Apostles; so that the very name must have exposed them to many inconveniences, and in very violent storms they would almost unavoidably suffer.

5. But if so many dreadful evils crept into the church at so early a period, and while labouring under such heavy inconveniences, even while the Apostles were yet living, and the miraculous gifts still existed, what abundant reason have we to take heed, who live in the drags of time, and no penal laws against us? Indeed, I am almost amazed that we are kept so free from corrupt doctrines, and corrupt practices as we are. What a condition was the church of Corinth in, at the time when the Apostle Paul

Paul wrote to them? Let any one read his first epistle, and what a hideous group of evils may he gather from thence. And although his second epistle had a very good effect, yet the cure was far from being perfected; he was still jealous over them with a godly jealousy, and he had very great cause so to be; hear him speak for himself. *For I fear, lest when I come I shall find you such as I would not, and that I shall be found unto you such as ye would not: lest there be debates, envyings, wraths, strifes, backbitings, whisperings, swellings, tumults: And, lest when I come again, my God will humble me among you, and that I shall bewail many which have sinned already, and have not repented of the uncleanness, and fornication, and lasciviousness which they have committed.** This is really a rueful picture, some of its features are truly frightful; *debates, wraths, strifes, backbitings, whisperings, swellings, tumults, fornication, lasciviousness, and unrepented of!* He might well fear a humbling stroke; for that is really the case with the ministers of Christ, when evils and corruptions find the way into their flocks; and what abundant cause is there to keep the field clear of such abominable weeds if possible? I own in some cases it is difficult and even dangerous to attempt plucking up the tares, lest we root up the wheat also. But let the husbandmen do their best, and leave the events to God!

Such

* 2 Cor. xii. 21.

6. Such as make these churches emblematical of future scenes, suppose the church of Pergamos to be an emblem of the state of things from the year 325, the time when christianity was established by law, to the year 1260; during which time there was a dreadful apostacy; and a time of very great darkness in point of historical knowledge. By the doctrines of Balaam, and by the eating things offered to idols they understood the abominable doctrines and pernicious practices which the ministers, in the beginning of that dreadful revolt, did not sufficiently guard the people against, until the torrent swelled too high to be repelled. About the year 1150, the Waldenses began to be noticed; how long they had existed previous to that time we cannot tell, some think that they never had been corrupted with the idolatries of the church of Rome; but had secreted themselves in such obscure places as the vallies of Piedmont, and among the Alps, till their numbers had increased, so that they could not be concealed any longer, and were now called forth to bear their testimony to the truths which they held; and dreadfully were they handled, in so much that it is said, by some writers, that a million were put to death in France alone; and if so, what must be the whole numbers of those morning stars of the reformation? who wandered in deserts, and in dens and caves of the earth; and were hunted like wild beasts, and all the powers of the earth summoned to root them out
of

of the land of the living. For that purpose the inquisition was set on foot, a dreadful scourge to Europe for several centuries; but it is demolishing, and will not last long, the fall of Babylon is begun; the foundation is shaken; and is sure to come down. God has been smiting his enemies with the sword that proceedeth out of his mouth. The vials are emptying apace; and the ten horns of the beast are making the whore desolate and naked.* We are on the eve of mighty things. The stone, which is cut out without hands, is breaking and subduing all the carnal tyrannical powers.† The crash will be great; yea, he will destroy the wicked; he will make them instrumental in destroying one another. He must reign till all his enemies become his footstool. O come, ye that are his people, enter into your chambers; shut the doors about you; hide for a little moment until the indignation be overpast. For behold, the Lord cometh out of his place to punish the inhabitants of the world for their iniquity; the earth also shall disclose her blood; and shall no more cover her slain.‡—Say ye to the righteous that it shall be well with him, yea, it is well with him. Wo to the wicked, it shall be ill with him, for the reward of his own hands shall be given him.§

7. The prophecies are rapidly filling up. Things unexpected have already come to pass, and heaven

18 Rev. xviii. 25. † Dan. ii. 44, 45. ‡ Isa. xxii. 25, 21.

and earth shall pass away, but not a tittle of what God has said shall fall to the ground. Though I detest the present war, and believe the motives of its promoters to be exceeding vile, yet there is a Providence in it; men have their ends in view, base and abominable as they are, and God will not fail to accomplish his own glorious designs; so that the wrath, yea, the ambition and covetousness of man shall praise him, and what is not for his glory he will restrain. All things shall work for good to such as love God. So that we may confidently sing,

How happy is the little flock
 Who safe beneath their guardian rock
 In all commotions rest!
 When wars and tumult's waves run high,
 Unmov'd above the storm they lie,
 They lodge in Jesu's breast.

Thus will the man Christ Jesus be an hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place, and as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land.* But in the mean time let us take heed to that important advice given by our Lord; *Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and stand before the Son of man.*†

K

LECTURE

* Isa. xxxii. 2.

† Luke xxi. 36.

LECTURE VI.

REV. ii. 17.

To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth, saving he that receiveth it.

NOTHING is more certain than that the christian's life is a warfare. This we know by scripture and experience, which I may say, are two infallible teachers which always accord, and never contradict one another. Hence it is that we are exhorted to put on the whole armour of God ; to be sober and vigilant ; so that we may stand in the evil day. To resist the wiles of the enemy. To watch and pray that we enter not into temptation. To take heed that we faint not, neither grow weary.

Now whatsoever was written afore time, was written for our learning, encouragement, and comfort, that we may not give way to the enemy. This church, upon the whole is commended, and had stood in the heat of the battle ; yet there were some things, which have been observed in the exposition, reprehensible, and called for amendment ; and to that end the Head of the church mingles reproof, caution,

tion, threatening and exhortation with much encouragement and consolation ; so we find all centre in the words of the text, *To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna.* From hence it may be proper to inquire,

First, What we have to overcome.

Secondly, How we may overcome.

Thirdly, The promise made to the overcomer.

I. 1. First, then, what is it which we have to overcome. Here I apprehend it is necessary to begin at home ; for here we shall find our foes to be bred and born in our own house, and therefore of our own household ; and a domestic enemy is the most dangerous of all. When either house, city or nation carries its enemies in its own bowels, there can be no safety there : these are sure to be traitors, and will not fail taking the advantage of every occasion that shall offer to betray the general interest. Such is our pride and self-will ; or join them together if you please, for they are but two names for one base quality ; for one battalion of our sworn enemies. This pride, or self-will, is the first-born son of perdition, which exalteth and opposeth itself to all that is called God ; and uttered its first rebellious speech to this effect, *I will exalt my throne above the stars of God—I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High.** Thus the prince of Tyrus said, *I am a god, I sit in the seat of God.†* Such is the sworn language of pride, whether uttered through the organ of man or devil ; and while

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* Isa. xiv. 14.

† Ezek. xxviii. 2.

it thus vaunts and swaggers it will not submit to the divine will. We see this prevails in all descriptions of men, from the tripple crowned Pope, or the arrogant Sultan, to the poor wretch who is acting the tyrant in his hut, over a poor slave, who is penanced to be his drudge under the name of a wife. This brood of the old serpent is a more extensive conqueror, and a greater despot than ever Pharaoh, Sennacherib, or Nebuchadnezzar, Alexander, or any other crowned adversary ever was; it has truly conquered the whole human race. Men of all nations, languages, people, creeds and professions have yielded to this tyrannical despot. It has filled the world with slaughter and bloodshed; it has filled courts with litigation and contention, neighbours with strife and confusion, private families with feuds and discord. It turned angels into devils, and expelled our first parents from paradise; has filled the world with misery; kindled the flames of hell, and peopled the regions of damnation with miserable inhabitants, the smoke of whose torment will ascend up for ever and ever. It is the hold of every foul spirit, and the cage of every unclean and hateful bird. All envyings, hatreds, pride, unbelief, hardness of heart, murders, revelling, drunkenness, worldly-mindedness, craft, cheating, lying, dissimulation, and whatever is base and vile issued from this abhorred womb, this Pandora's box, whether it is found in men or devils. O! it is the root of all bitterness, and the disturber of all true peace, which
brought

brought death into the world, and all our wo. Why art thou fretful? why art thou discontented? Why art thou disturbed at trifles? Why does envy lurk in thy heart? Because self-will is there. There is the cause of every disease, in every description of mankind, let the dress be ermine or rags; let the habitation be a palace or a hut; let the profession be churchman, or dissenter, deist or nothing. O, my soul! be thou apprised of this deadly enemy to thy peace, and thy Saviour's glory.

2. We have the cares, snares, and customs of the world to overcome, and these are no trifling foes. The cares of the world wear the aspect of duty, and are entrenched behind a variety of plausible pretences, such as frugality, forecast, necessary care, providing things honest in the sight of all men; all of which are very good words, and if properly applied have a very good meaning; but like other good things are liable to very great abuse until the mind is full of confusion and distraction, and the life and soul of religion quite eat up. These obtruding cares are like the fowls of prey, that laboured to devour the sacrifice which Abraham was about to offer up. Like a destructive pestilence they carry infection with them, and corrupt the whole man. They spoil many a good sermon, by carrying the thoughts into the shop, the warehouse, the counting-house, the field, the barn, the market, the kitchen; and I know not what beside. Well may our blessed Lord give them so many broadsides in his heart-searching

sermon on the mount. These cares produce many snares, which prove very dangerous, and often destructive. In trade and commerce they often lead to craft, over-reaching, extortion and oppression, which must prove highly offensive to God, and pernicious to the soul. For the love of money is the root of all evil, and will effectually drown the mind in perdition. In the parable of the sower, our Lord compares the seed that fell among thorns to such *as hear the word, but the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lust, or desire, of other things enter in and choak the word, and it becometh unfruitful.** Here our Lord connects the *deceitfulness of riches*, with the cares of the world, and hence they become snares, for *the desire of other things* is joined with them. The desire of honour, pleasure, indulgencies of various kinds. Solomon says, *the fear of man bringeth a snare,†* and that servile fear is generally connected with the cares of the world. They naturally lead us to depend upon the arm of flesh, and herein we are sure to meet with disappointment; for *curst is the man who trusteth in man, and maketh the arm of flesh his hope.†* Thus by little and little he is led away from his God, to give way to and do things which he never thought of, and thereby gets his conscience more and more blinded, and his heart hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. It is therefore no wonder that he should conform to the customs of the world, in company,

* Mark iii. 19. † Jer. xvii. 5.

pany, in dress, and in his actions of various kinds. Among politicians many bad actions are avowedly done, and are allowed to be so; but for reasons of state, they tell you, it cannot be otherwise. Thus many an innocent life has been taken for that very reason, and also many bloody wars have been set on foot, and multitudes of lives wantonly thrown away *for reasons of state*. That was the pretence for taking away the life of the Lord of glory. *What do we? for this man doeth many miracles. If we let him thus alone, that is, if we do not destroy him, innocent as he is, all men will believe in him, and the Romans shall come and take away our place and nation.* Yea, and the high-priest both conformed and explained their meaning, *It is expedient, saith he, that is, the state requires that one man should die for the people.** Such is the reasoning of carnal politicians. In trade there are things sometimes done, confessedly, not perfectly consistent with justice, not consistent with the rules of christianity; but the quaint excuse has been, that it is according to the rules of trade. Thus rules of trade, and reasons of state, however unjust, absurd or cruel, must be attended to, and practised; and will not the man of the world, who is involved in all its cares, be taken in its snares, and thus become conformable to the same. And will all these oppose the progress of the christian? Undoubtedly they will; and therefore he must set his face as a flint in the way;
for

* John xi. 47—52.

for if he is conformable to the world he cannot be conformable to Christ. He cannot serve two masters: he cannot serve God and mammon. If any man love the world the love of the Father is not in him.

3. But the christian hero has another battalion of enemies to encounter, who arrange themselves immediately under the standard of Satan, called principalities and powers, and the rulers of the darkness of this world. O! how cunning and subtle are these? Nay how strong and powerful. The various names given to their hellish leader plainly evidence that he is a formidable enemy. He is called the Old Serpent,* which shews his amazing craftiness; and he manifested that craftiness in seducing the angels in heaven, and Adam, or at least Eve in paradise, and Judas in the school of Christ. He is called *a god, the angel of the bottomless pit, the strong man armed*; all which intimate his amazing power; and that power he is sure to exert in the destruction of the saints. He is called *a roaring lion, and is going about seeking whom he may devour*; and that shews his insatiable cruelty, being bent upon our eternal ruin. He is called our *adversary*, and our *enemy* from whom we can expect no quarter. The word rendered devil, means an accuser, a calumniator, hence he is styled the accuser of the brethren, who accuses them before God day and night.† We see a little of this in the case of Job;

* 2 Cor. xi. 2. Rev. xx. 2.

† Rev. xii. 10.

Job;* and we may be assured that he continues the same still; and therefore we are put upon our guard; seeing Satan desires to have us that he may sift us as wheat. Therefore we must put on the whole armour of God, that we may resist those wiles, and stand in the evil day; and not only stand, but come off more than conquerors through him that loved us.

II. Seeing we have such mighty foes, it is time to inquire how we may overcome.

1. By the wisdom of God directing. We need the wisdom that sitteth by his throne to direct us in every step we take; the wisdom of the schools, the senate, the court, the camp, the exchange or the counting-house will not suffice in this business. No, all that wisdom which is of the world can only direct in worldly things, that is its element, the only sea in which it can roll. But, blessed be God, there is an infallible guide, by which we can discover our enemies, and the way to defeat them. It is the spirit which searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. It is this Spirit which sounds the unbelieving heart, and discovers unto man what is in himself, the pride, the unbelief, the enmity, and deceit which lurk within him. It is the same heavenly teacher which must manifest the various workings of that cunning adversary of whom we have been speaking. St. Paul calls his schemes, *devices*, and devices of a deadly nature, of which we should not be ignorant. The bird will fall into the

* Job i. 9, 10, 11. Chap. ii. 4, 5.

the snare which it is ignorant of ; so will the soul of man. Besides, Satan can transform himself into an angel of light, and by that means deceive the hearts of the simple. O what need is there to cry out, " Send forth thy light, and thy truth, Lord ; let them lead me to thy holy hill and to thy dwelling-place." Here Jehovah has promised to lead the blind by a way which they know not ; to make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight. By this divine wisdom every snare will be discovered, and our way made plain and clear before us ; so shall our path be like that of the just, even as the shining light which shineth more and more to the perfect day.

2. But bare wisdom is not sufficient ; for I may see an eminence before me, but not be able to reach it ; therefore in the matter in hand power is as necessary as wisdom ; and nothing less than the power of God will avail in this momentous conflict. If we assay to go in our own strength we shall be like David in Saul's armour ;* or like the Israelites against the Amalekites,† who were shamefully beaten ; or like Peter, who declared, that if all should deny the Lord, he would not deny him, though he should go to prison or death with him. All these failed ; they trusted in themselves and were confounded. But where do we find an instance of any one trusting in Jehovah and failing ? No ; they that trust in the Lord, are like mount Zion, that can never be moved.

In

* 1 Sam. xvii. 29.

† Num. xiv. 40—45.

In every lawful conflict we may confidently claim the promised aid; and many are the promises of strength in the time of trouble. Let the struggling soul attend to what Jehovah says, *He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength. Even the youths, who trust in themselves, shall faint and be weary, and the young men, who are confident in their strength, shall utterly fall. But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength: they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.** To the same labouring soul he speaks thus, *Fear thou not, for I am with thee; be not dismayed, for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee, yea, I will help thee, yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.†* This has been a word in season to many a fainting soul; and the promise is as much in force now as when it was first made. God's promises are not like repealed acts of Parliament, without force or efficacy; no, he and his word are the same yesterday and to-day and for ever. To him that believeth all things are possible, and every believer may say, I can do all things through Christ strengthening me; yea, when I am weak then am I strong. How did the Psalmist exult in the strength of his God in the eighteenth Psalm? We may observe, that psalm was a triumphant thanksgiving for all his victories, and for deliverance from all his troubles; and what
a bright

* Isa. xl. 29, 30, 31.

† Cha. . xli. 10.

a bright assemblage of epithets does he compose to shew his deliverer in the first verse! *The Lord is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer: my God, my strength, in whom I trust; my buckler, and the horn of my salvation.* From thence he proceeds, in the most sublime language, to display the majesty of the Most High in raising all the elements in his behalf. And in the sixteenth and seventeenth verses how feelingly does he describe his own weakness? *He sent from above, he took me and drew me, and drew me out of many waters. He delivered me from my strong enemy, and from them which hated me: for they were too strong for me.* And, again, verse twenty-ninth, how does he exult! *For by thee I have run through a troop; and by my God I have leaped over a wall.* Importing that through the strength of God, he had overcome the greatest difficulties; and conquered the most powerful enemies. He found this most eminently to be the case when he encountered the hedious *Goliath*, and indeed in many other instances. He might well sing in cheerful accents, the *King shall joy in thy strength, O Lord, and in thy salvation how greatly shall he rejoice.** For, says he, *the King trusted in the Lord, and through the mercy of the Most High, he shall not be moved.†* Thus to him that believeth strength shall be imparted according to his day.

3. But we want a stimulus within, and that is the love of God shed abroad in the heart by the Holy

* Psa. xxi. 1.

† Ver. 7.

Holy Ghost given unto us. This is the very life, the perpetual motion of the soul of man. This is the sap which makes all the trees of righteousness fruitful in all good works. *Love indeed is stronger than death; many waters cannot quench it; floods of persecutions or troubles cannot drown it.* Kem-
 pis says, "It bears a burden without a burden." Yes, it beareth all things, it hopeth all things, it endureth all things. It never faileth. Knowledge without this godlike, this heaven-born property, is but like the shining of the moon, which, though it looks pleasing, leaves the earth as cold and unfruitful as if it shone not at all; but love is like the splendid sun, which does not only disperse the clouds, but gives a cheering influence to the creation; creating fertility on the whole earth. Very excellent things are said of faith and hope; but love excels them, both in nature and extent. God is not said to be either faith or hope; but it is said that, God is love, and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God and God in him. Love is the end of the commandment; and it is ever attended with a pure conscience, yea with every grace of the Spirit. I may say, it is the sum of all religion; so that whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, or lovely, or of good report, all are included in love. Love worketh no ill to his neighbour, and therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.

“ Knowledge, alas ! 'tis all in vain,
 And all in vain our fear ;
 Our stubborn sins will fight and reign
 If love be absent there.”

Love is the most excellent in its duration. It never faileth. Faith will be changed into fight, and hope will be lost in a happy fruition, while love, the fairest offspring of the Deity, shall exist for ever. It is the religion of glory, the religion of the spirits of just men made perfect. Hence our lovely poet says again,

“ This is the grace that lives and sings
 When faith and hope shall cease ;
 'Tis this shall strike our joyful strings
 In the sweet realms of bliss.”

Right opinions grafted upon a four, unlovely soul, are just like the vineyard bringing forth four grapes. They never will be any credit to religion, nor comfort to such a professor. As there is no fear in love, so there is no misery ; if there is such a thing in the world as happiness, it must be found in the loving soul. Therefore love is sure to gain the victory, the man possessed of this god-like property is sure to prevail, and will be more than conqueror through him that loved him. Whatever you possess besides, seek after love ; yea, pray for it, read for it, believe for it, hope for it ; yea, get it at any price, and verily you shall prevail.

III. I come now to consider the group of promises here made to the overcomer.

1. *He shall eat of the hidden manna.* I have hinted,

ted, in the preceding discourse, that I believe the manna alludes to that which was laid up in the golden pot, or urn, and was taken into the promised land,* which was a type of Christ, who is the bread of life, as he says in the sixth of St. John; and to which the apostle refers in the first of Corinthians and the tenth. The promises then in the text mean the full enjoyment of all the benefits of Christ's mediatorial undertakings in a state of glory. For undoubtedly every true believer does partake of that hidden manna in some degree even here on earth, or he could not be alive to God. For except we eat the flesh of the Son of God, and drink his blood, we have no life in us. Eating his flesh and drinking his blood are expressions, which signify, our coming to him, and believing in him. As he saith, *I am the bread of life; he that cometh unto me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst.*† So in another place he cried, *If any man thirst, let him come to me and drink, and he that believeth on me out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.*‡ And, it is immediately added, *this he spake of the Spirit which they that believed on him should receive.* As bread sustains the body, so Christ is the true substance of a never dying soul, and the body can as well live without corporal food, as the soul can be kept alive without Jesus; for he is the life of our life, being the quickening spirit, the Lord from heaven.

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* Exod. xvi. 33. Heb. ix 3.

† John vi. 35.

‡ Chap. vii. 38, 39.

heaven. But the full extent of this promise in the text, can only be accomplished in glory; for the promise is made to the overcomer, he who obtains the final victory.

2. Moreover, the hidden manna may denote the love of God, a taste of which we have here; but the full fruition of that also is reserved for the overcomer. Not to enter into all the conceits, or rabbinical fictions of the Jews concerning the manna, of which I suppose they know just as much of the matter as we do; I say, passing by all these, we may safely say, that it suited the constitution of the whole camp of the Israelites, nor could they live without it; which is the case with all God's Israel now, whether on earth or in glory. It suits, that is, the love of God suits every heir of grace, whether on earth or in glory; nor is there any comfort or spiritual life without it. The world can as well exist without a sun as a church, either on earth or in glory, without Christ, or without the love of the Father. But let the term denote a precious Christ, or the love of the Father, it undoubtedly denotes a state of glory which is indeed indiscrivable by any poor worm of the earth, nor can it in any wise be comprehended by such as dwell in houses of clay. For eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man, to conceive what God hath laid up for them that love him. Here human language sinks; we have nothing adapted to its sublimity; nay imagination fails, and even thought is lost. It is

is called in the text *hidden manna*; hidden indeed, not only from the natural man, however wise and prudent he may be, but even to the saints, for it did not appear, even to the Apostles while in the body, what we shall be; but we shall be like him, whatever that likeness is, for we shall see him as he is. Let the encouraging prospect lead us as from conquering to conquer, till at length we sing aloud, Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.

3. But farther, He will give the conqueror *a white stone, and in it a new name which no man knows saving he that receiveth it*. In a former discourse it has been hinted, that the white stone refers to the manner of giving votes for or against criminals. The vote for condemnation was the putting a black stone into the urn which was set to receive the votes, and the vote for acquittance was a white stone; and it seems the party acquitted had a white stone given him, the pledge of his acquittance; and if the acquittance was very honourable, he had some honorary title, or motto, engraven upon his stone, which he himself was privy to. Likewise the allusion may be taken from heroes, or combatants who had acquitted themselves honourably either in battle, or in some of the athletic games, and different rewards and honours were conferred upon them, according to the nature of the conflict, and the manner in which the conqueror had behaved. St. Paul

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abounds

abounds with allusions taken from these different exercises.

4. The white stone, undoubtedly, denotes a full and final justification at the last day; for although every believing soul has a divine acquittance in his own conscience here, yet the body must turn to dust, and remain in that state of disgrace till the last trump shall blow; then it shall be raised, and animated with its immortal spirit, and must take its final trial; for, we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that every one may receive the reward of the deeds done in the body, whether it be good or evil. It will be then, I apprehend, that our blessed Lord will act the last part of his mediatorial office, and that in the behalf of his saints. It will be then that he will say, *Deliver the prisoner from going down to the pit, I have found a ransom for him.* If this was not the case, not one of Adam's guilty race could be saved; for first and last, we must be saved by grace; but as every believer commits his cause into the hand of Christ, he will thoroughly plead the same; for he says, *Because I live, ye shall live also.* All therefore waiting to receive the final sentence, the saints will be acquitted, though their iniquities shall be sought for, yet they shall not be found. Thus shall they receive the white stone, a final justification, in the presence of infinite numbers, most likely of both the just and the unjust.

5. But they shall not only be acquitted, but even their works of faith, and labour of love, shall be brought

brought forward, and this may be implied in the *new name* which is spoken of. It was very common for the Romans to give honorary fir names to their celebrated commanders, taken from the countries which they are said to have conquered, as Africanus, Germanicus, &c. and very likely there may be some allusion to that custom in the text. But names in scripture generally signify something in nature; hence the father of the faithful was first called *Abram*, the father of the people, or the high father; but after proving his fidelity to his Lord, Jehovah styles him *Abraham*, the father of a multitude of people. So his grandson, Jacob, a supplanter was his original name; but when he wrestled and prevailed, his new name was Israel; for he was now a prince with God. Thus the new name is a title of honour which shall never be forgotten. Hence we find the Lord urging the same thing upon his church, by way of encouragement, *Thou shalt be called by a new name, which the mouth of the Lord shall name. Thou shalt be a crown of glory, and a royal diadem in the hand of thy God. Thou shalt no more be termed Forsaken; neither shall thy land any more be termed desolate; but thou shalt be called Hephzibah, that is my delight, and thy land Beulah, that is married; for the Lord delighteth in thee, and thy land shall be married.** Now all this is promised to the church as a part of her millennial glory; so that her name is a praise to her and her glorious Lord;

* Isa. lxii. 2, 3, 4.

Lord; how much greater will be the triumphal glory which is promised to the overcomer in the words of the text? They will then be called emphatically *the holy people, the redeemed of the Lord: and thou shalt be called Sought out, a city not forsaken.* This new name therefore implies the avowed dignity and honour which God puts upon his servants, the pledge of which he gives them in their own souls here, which is a secret to all but themselves; but he will proclaim this openly in the day when he makes up his jewels; and every "conquering saint may sweetly sing,"

"Then will he own my worthless name

Before his Father's face;

And in the New Jerusalem

Appoint my soul a place."

Indeed eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. There is not one good action which will be lost. The martyrs, and noble confessors of a crucified God, will stand forth with their glorious scars and wounds, with a lustre, which God their Saviour will impress upon them, which will be an eternal monument of praise to them; the honour of which will redound to him through whom they are more than conquerors. Not one generous act shall be forgotten. Let every generous heart remember this; yea, and every poor niggard also, that God is not

not unrighteous to forget your *work of faith and labour of love, which is shewn toward his name*, in administering to his saints of the ability which he hath bestowed. How strikingly has our Lord set before us the process of the great day, and has given us a summary of the manner in which he will proceed in Matthew 25.

I shall conclude this discourse by making a few very short remarks.

1. We see the divine life is here a warfare. It has been so from the beginning ; so that it is no new scheme. It has ever been necessary to exhort the saints to fight the good fight of faith, in order that they may lay hold of eternal life. Our enemies are still lively and strong, and their vigilance, enmity, and hatred are as violent as ever. Time does not destroy their enmity. No, nothing will root it out, but the mighty power of God. Remember, that either force or fraud are continually employed in the ruin and desolation of the church of God. It is a war which admits of no truce, no suspension ; for if force appear to be withdrawn, craft and guile are going forward ; and that is often more dangerous than open violence. But the war is for life, and therefore keep on the harness, keep on the whole armour of God, till our Captain shall sign our discharge.

2. But we see the amazing encouragement which is given to all the faithful soldiers of the cross. God will be our strength and our refuge, a present help in time of trouble. He promises to be with us in the war,

war, and he sets the crown before us, so that we may be encouraged to go forward ;

“ Nor fear to win the day,
Though death and hell obstruct the way.”

Some refiners reckon that, we should not be induced to act from either motives of hope or fear ; for that such motives are selfish, and beneath the dignity of a Christian. But I doubt this is carrying the matter too high, yea, higher than the Bible carries it. Such high speculations may suit the spirits of just men made perfect; but I doubt they will not do for those who are in houses of clay. It is said of Moses, that he had respect unto the recompence of reward;* and of one greater than Moses, that *for the joy that was set before him, he endured the cross and despised the shame.*† If rewards and punishments are to be disregarded, why are they so often held out to us in the oracles of God? Why does our Lord declare, that *in his Father's house are many mansions*; that *he had prepared a place for them, and would come and receive them to himself*? Why does he declare that the wicked *shall go away into everlasting punishment; but the righteous into life eternal*? Nay, if promises of eternal felicity are to be disregarded, why are they made in all the epistles to the Seven Churches? All that is said of *the white stone, the hidden manna, the new name, the being made a pillar in the temple of God to go no more out, the walking with him in white, the sitting upon*
his.

* Heb xi. 26. † Chap. xii. 2.

his throne ; I say, all this, and much more to the same effect, is all to no purpose, if it be not intended to encourage us in well-doing. But we need those reviving cordials, and I bless God that they are there. May they encourage us in our pilgrimage to urge our way to the heavenly Canaan.

3. Let us fully and heartily engage in this work ; that is, the final conquest over sin, the world, and Satan. Our Saviour bids us be of good cheer : he has overcome the world ; yea, and he will enable us to overcome also. Hard have been the conflicts of the greater part of the servants of Jesus : the enemy has assailed them from every quarter ; but they have overcome by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony. Jehovah is the same ; and has declared, that no weapon formed against his struggling servants shall prosper ; and every tongue which shall rise up in judgment against them shall be condemned. Out of weakness they shall be made strong ; for the war is just and necessary, seeing it is purely defensive ; yea, it is for life, and therefore in every respect justifiable. Struggle on, then, ye followers of the Lamb ; a few more crosses, a few more trials, a few more conflicts of soul ; so shall you sing at last, Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors, through him that loved us.

LECTURE VII.

REV. ii. 18—29.

And unto the Angel of the church in Thyatira, write; These things saith the Son of God, who hath his eyes like unto a flame of fire, and his feet are like fine brasse; I know thy works, and charity, and service, and faith, and thy patience, and thy works; and the last to be more than the first. Notwithstanding, I have a few things against thee, because thou suffereſt that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols. And I gave her space to repent of her fornication, and she repented not. Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds. And I will kill her children with death; and all the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts: and I will give unto every one of you according to your works. But unto you I say, and unto the rest in Thyatira, As many as have not this doctrine, and which have not known the depths of Satan, as they speak, I will put upon you none other burden:

den. But that which ye have already, hold fast till I come. And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations: And he shall rule them with a rod of iron: as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers, even as I received of my Father. And I will give him the morning star. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

THYATIRA was about forty-eight miles from Pergamos, a place nowhere else mentioned in scripture, nor in any profane author that I remember; of course, we cannot tell by whom the gospel was planted there. However, there appears to have been a church at this time, in which were many excellent things, even such as the glorious Head of the church marks with high approbation. The only fault was, remissness of discipline; but as it was an inlet to every evil, the Lord checks it in the bud, which was the best way to prevent its mischief. The sooner pernicious weeds are plucked up the better; for if they are permitted to grow up, they disseminate themselves, and soon overspread the field with their baneful influence. Now the key of discipline is committed to ministers, and they ought to be very careful in opening and shutting, in separating the precious from the vile, or sin will lie at their door; and great care should be taken to this end, to keep the threshing-floor as pure as we can. We are informed that the Lord walks among his candle-

sicks, and therefore great care should be taken to remove whatever would offend the eyes of his majesty. In this church he commends what was good, by way of encouragement; which is done in much wisdom, and in which we see the affection of a tender Father; but he as freely reprehends what is amiss, in which is no less kindness; seeing, as many as he loves he rebukes and chastens, that they may be partakers of his holiness.

I shall treat this epistle as I have done the former, by considering it part by part in an expository way; and then make a few general observations from the whole.

I. 1. We have first the preface,—*To the angel, the chief minister of the church in Thyatira*, write the things which I command. The evangelist was but the amanuensis to his blessed Lord, and was not to insert any thing but what was dictated to him by his divine Master. It is even so in preaching; namely, that nothing be said contrary to the divine word. When Ezekiel prophesied, it was as he was commanded; and when Jonah preached to the Ninevites, it was the preaching which God had charged him with. Let all preaching and writing be agreeable to the simple meaning of God's word.

2. *Write, these things saith the Son of God, who hath his eyes like unto a flaming fire, and his feet like unto fine brass.* The term, Son of God, marks out the person who is the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person, and the first born of every creature. He is the first out
streaming

streaming of the Deity ; and, as touching his human nature, must have had a beginning ; but as touching his divine nature was from everlasting. To attempt explaining this great mystery, God manifested in the flesh, would be darkening counsel with words without knowledge, and would only confuse the matter ; which has frequently been done to the no small advantage of the infidels, and the stumbling of the weak. I am satisfied that the fulness of the Godhead dwells in him bodily, without inquiring how it is ; it is an article of faith, not of reason : I do not say that it is contrary to reason, but it is quite above the reach of reason ; as indeed many other things are of a far inferior nature. The apostle gives us his character at large in the first chapter, when he had such a glorious manifestation of him that he fell at his feet as dead : and he brings in a part of that glorious description in the preface to every church ; and that part which he describes is supposed to suit the state of that church to which he writes.

3. *His eyes are here said to be like unto a flame of fire, and his feet like fine brass.* By his eyes we may understand his deep, piercing knowledge ; for he is the searcher of hearts and the trier of reins. *His eyes are in every place, beholding the evil and the good.** He knew the designs of the Pharisees when they had laid a deep scheme to take away his life ; and even the temporary believers, their real state was known to him, and therefore he put no confidence:

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* Pro. xv. 3.

confidence in them, *because he knew all men, and needed not that any should testify of man; for he knew what was in man.** He even knew the traitor from the beginning. Moreover, *his eyes being as a flame of fire,* indicate his just displeasure against sin, wherever it is found; nor will he wink at it even among his own children. No; he will visit their transgressions with a rod, and their iniquities with stripes. We see this exemplified among the Israelites of old; yea, in some of his favorite servants. I make no doubt but that long scene of toil and labour which Jacob endured, and various trials and difficulties which befel him, were in consequence of his telling so many palpable lies when he obtained the blessing from Isaac. And it is certain that David brought a series of heavy calamities upon himself as a just reward for his adultery and murder.

4. *The feet* of our blessed Lord said to be *like fine brass*, may denote the footsteps of his providence, which conducts every thing in good order, and with the greatest propriety; although short-sighted mortals can but see a little way into the propriety of the divine œconomy, yet all things are working for good. There are many things done by judicious parents which their children cannot see into till they come to years of maturity; and then they are quite satisfied that their parents acted wisely. But there is an infinite disproportion betwixt the wisdom of the wisest of mortals, and that of Jehovah.

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* John ii. 24, 25.

5. *His feet* may likewise denote his infinite power in treading down all opposition, let it spring from what quarter soever it will. His divine work is sure to meet with very much opposition, as long as the devil and his angels are permitted to rove up and down, and so long as there is a carnal mind, which is enmity against God: but, maugre all opposition, our Lord will go from conquering to conquer; and to him every knee shall bow, and every tongue shall confess him to be Lord, to the glory of the Father.

II. We now come to the body of the letter.

1. *I know thy works, and charity, and service, and thy patience, and thy works; and the last to be more than the first.* Here is an extraordinary character indeed!—Here is a group of the most excellent properties, all known and approved by him whose eyes are as a flame of fire. *I know thy works;* works of piety towards God, and works of mercy towards men, all springing from pure motives, that is, pure love to God, and benevolence to mankind; hence *charity*, or rather *love*, is in the blessed assemblage; and wherever that is found every good property is found. The term *service*, as applied to the angel of the church, may signify his ministerial labour, both in public and private, for the good of his fellow-sinners; and in which, I apprehend, he had not spared himself. The term *faith*, may signify his faithfulness, or fidelity, which as a steward he had acted with great uprightness, which indeed is a great character,—especially in some cases, which

are particularly trying, and may call for much resolution ; and in doing our duty we may be blamed, and lose the favour of our friends. A time-server will never run any risk which he can any ways avoid : he will not give up the favour of man for the sake of the truth ; but a faithful servant will give up all, and that will raise a huge outcry against him. Friends will murmur, and blame his imprudence ; or, it may be, they will call it rashness ; his enemies will storm, rage, and threaten ; and it may be, some who had been ready to pluck their eyes out and give them to him, are now at an issue with him, and are become his bitterest enemies ; therefore he will require very great *patience* ; and for that excellent grace this angel is highly commended. It is certain he had met with some trials, or his patience would not have been proved ; nor so well approved by him whose flaming eyes could not be deceived. There is scarcely any thing which realizes religion so much as well-tryed patience. It is a grace which does not make a great show : others may make a more brilliant appearance, like some kinds of flowers in a garden ; but patience is like an evergreen :—it bears the blasts, the tempests and winds, and weathers the winter through. If this charming grace be amiable in a private Christian, it is much more so in a Christian minister ; and sometimes he conquers more by that very means, than by all the exertions which he can make. The Lord brings in *works* again : so pleasing are works of faith and love in his sight, that he notes them

them with a peculiar approbation; and he will do so in the great day.

2. The angel of this church is not only commended for a variety of excellent qualities, but abounding therein, which is a rare case; but here the Lord testifies that *the last were more than the first*. In the angel of the church of Ephesus were many excellent properties; yet there was a sad declension, in that he had left his first love; but *here* was an abounding in the work of the Lord. Happy are all those who grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour. Thus far we meet with every thing that is excellent; but now even this amiable angel must receive a reprehension for suffering some irregularities in the church.

3. *Notwithstanding* those excellent things which I so highly approve of, *I have a few things against thee; because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols*. It is not an easy matter to determine who this Jezebel was: some have thought her to have been the minister's wife; which I think is very unlikely: others have thought her to have been *Hellena*, the mistress of Simon Magus; but that appears as improbable: indeed, some think that it was not any individual woman, but rather a heresy, and so called by way of detestation by that name, in reference to that odious woman, the wife of Ahab, king of Israel, who was a great patroness of idolatry; and

according to the words of Jehu,* she must have been a monster in lewdness ; and therefore whoever or whatever is meant by Jezebel in this place, *fornication, and things offered to idols*, were inculcated by them, which were so extremely offensive to the great Head of the church. Fornication and idolatry were usually connected together ; seeing Venus, and some other idols, were worshipped by such filthy rites. If the church of Thyatira refers to the time which it is thought to do, by such as make these churches emblematical, then, undoubtedly the name Jezebel refers to the abominations of the church of Rome. But there is no doubt but there was some busy, pragmatical woman, who was introducing these corrupt and abominable doctrines among them, which the excellent pastor was either ignorant of, or, perhaps her influence might be such, that he thought it would be dangerous to attack her ; for sometimes that is the case, and requires no small resolution in a minister to do his duty ; as he may fear lest he should do more hurt than good.

4. *I gave her space to repent of her fornication, and she repented not.* Such was the forbearance of God to that corrupt Jezebel, the wife of Ahab : Some years intervened between the time that Elijah pronounced her doom,† and her death ;‡ so that she had all that time to reflect upon her infamous conduct ; yet, it appears she repented not. So the Jezebel in our text, whoever or whatever she was, had

* 2 Kings ii. 22. † 1 Kings xxi. 23. ‡ 2 Kings ix. 33.

had time given her for the same purpose, yet it was not regarded. And does not God give space to repent to every sinner? Undoubtedly he does; yea, and means of repentance too. The parable of the fig-tree is a proof of this. It had first three years; and, at the interposition of the dresser, a fourth was added; so that there was sufficient time; and the digging about it and manuring it, is a proof that sufficient means were employed; and such is the mercy and long forbearance of God to sinners, so that if they perish, their blood will be upon their own head. In consequence of not repenting, the Lord says, *Behold, I will cast her into a bed*: not into a bed of sensual delight; but as she was an impenitent wanton, it will be a bed of sorrow, pain, and dreadful anguish; yea, a bed of fire and brimstone; a fire that never shall be quenched, and where their worm of a tormenting conscience shall never die. Not only the seducers, the ringleaders in wickedness, shall be punished, but even such as are seduced, and thereby become copartners in wickedness; and repentance is the only way to prevent the fearful doom.

5. *And I will kill her children with death*, as the children of Ahab and Jezebel were cut off,* so God will follow the converts of corrupt doctrines with his awful judgments; and perhaps visit the iniquities of those corrupt fathers upon their children who tread in their steps, either by judgments of a temporal or eternal nature; and therefore great care should

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* 2 Kings x. 7.

be taken of apostacy ; for undoubtedly fearful vengeance will await such. For it would have been much better for such not to have known the way of righteousness, than after knowing it, turn from the holy commandment.

6. But even the judgments of God will turn to the advantage of the faithful ; hence he says, *And all the churches, in all ages, in all places, shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts,* and therefore a plain proof of his omniscience, and consequently of his divinity ; hence it is his prerogative to *give to every man according to his works.* But this passage requires a further consideration, and therefore I shall dismiss it for the present. Having marked out what was offensive in this Jezebel and her adherents, he again addresses himself to the faithful of the flock.

7. *But unto you I say, and unto the rest in Thyatira, As many as have not known the depths of Satan as they speak,* who have not been initiated into the deep mysteries of Jezebel and her associates ; for they affect great depths of knowledge, but they are depths of Satan. All seducers must pretend to something extraordinary ; and many troublers of the primitive church affected extraordinary wisdom ; hence they called themselves Gnosticks, men of knowledge ; or, as we call them, wise men ; and most likely such as the apostle speaks of in 2 Tim. iii. from the beginning, and such as St. John marks out in his epistles. However, all were not corrupted :

ted : there were many who kept their garments unspotted, and were happily ignorant of Satan's devices, and were simply following the highway of holiness : to such he says, *I will put no other burden upon you* : I will require none of those mysteries from you, nor any thing contrary to my yoke, which is easy, and my burden, which is light. *But that which ye have* already received, namely, faith and a good conscience, *hold fast*, in spite of all opposition, *till I come* to call thee from thy state of probation, and receive thee into mine everlasting kingdom. Let every believer who reads this lay it to heart, and strictly attend unto the same. For he that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved. Therefore, thou follower of the Lamb, hold fast that thou hast, that no man take thy crown.

8. But if this church is to be understood as an emblem of the state of things from 1260 to 1520, the exhortation must be to the church in general, and especially to the ministers, to hold fast the doctrine and purity of the gospel, till those dark seasons should pass over, and the millennial glory should come forward : Satan should be shut up in the bottomless pit, and thereby be prevented from deceiving the nations any more for a long season.

III. We come to the conclusion.

1. *He that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations.* Every believer is a soldier of Jesus Christ, and therefore is engaged in a warfare ; nor must he think of putting off his armour till he put off his body.

body. He must continue to use the shield of faith, and the sword of the Spirit, and continue in the work of the Lord till his discharge be signed, and then shall he be more than conqueror. Whatever station we are called to act in, let us keep it, and the work of our divine calling, stedfast unto the end, to the end of our probationary days; then will the Lord honour him with a divine triumph: *I will, says Jesus, give him power over the nations.*

2. This promise must allude either to the millenium, or to the day of judgment. If to the former, we have it more fully described in the nineteenth chapter, from the eleventh verse to the end, where the beast and the false prophet are finally overthrown; that is, both Popery and Mahometanism will be finally destroyed; for they have long made *war with the Lamb, yet the Lamb shall overcome them; and such as are with him are called, and chosen, and faithful*;* yea, faithful unto the end. It is then *the Ancient of days shall come, and judgment shall be given to the saints of the Most High; and then shall the saints possess the kingdom.*† I believe that day is not far off; the signs of the times bespeak it near.

3. But if the promise in the text refer to the final judgment, that is more particularly described by St. Paul. *Do ye not know, says he, that the saints shall judge the world? Know ye not that we shall judge angels?*‡ The trial of the saints being over, and they

* Rev. xvii. 12. † Dan. vii. 22. ‡ 1 Cor. vi. 2, 3.

they being acquitted and approved; then, as the body of Christ, they shall be assessors with him in judgment, upon the wicked. He will then judge his enemies, and they being found guilty, *he shall dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel*: and as his saints are one with him, as he and his Father are one, the same power is ascribed to them also. What a mighty change, both in the Lord and his servants! He was despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: Such were many of his servants; but now the scene is changed: as they suffered with their Lord, so they shall reign with him. Yes, gracious Lord!

“ Who bore thy cross shall wear thy crown,
 Shall triumph in thy victory;
 And in thy glorious throne sit down,
 And reign in endless bliss with thee!”

High encouragement indeed! How must all his enemies stand amazed and confounded at the mighty change which shall take place! Whatever other meanings may be put upon our Saviour's prophecies, their full accomplishment can only be in his grand appearance at the last. For *then there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon earth distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring; Men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth; for the powers of heaven shall be shaken. Then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.*

glory.* *Then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.† For behold he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also who pierced him; and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him.‡* Now, I say, let these, and a multitude of other passages of the same kind, have what historical meaning they may, surely their supreme meaning must not be explained away; for though heaven and earth shall pass away, not one jot or tittle shall pass away till all shall be fulfilled.

4. And as the change in our glorified head will be surprising, so will it be in all his sacred members. This is also finely described, though in an apocryphical book: "Then shall the righteous man stand in great boldness before the face of such as have afflicted him and made no account of his labours. When they see it, they shall be troubled with terrible fear, and shall be amazed at the strangeness of his salvation, so far beyond all they looked for. And they, repenting, and groaning for anguish of spirit, shall say within themselves, This was he whom we held sometimes in derision and a proverb of reproach. We fools counted his life madness, and his end to be without honour. How is he numbered among the children of God, and his lot among the saints!"||

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* Luke xxi. 25, 26, 27.

† Matt. xxiv. 30.

‡ Rev. i. 7.

|| Wisdom v. 1---6.

5. The term *potter's vessel*, which is several times used in the sacred writings, signifies an entire destruction; for there is no repairing of an earthen vessel: Hence we find Jeremiah was commanded to take an earthen bottle and to break it in sight of the ancients of the people and the ancients of the priests, to shew the utter destruction of that generation.* The figure also shews how easily the Lord can do this. A vessel made of other materials might be repaired, or it might be melted over again; but an earthen vessel must be reduced to dust; and thus it shews the final destruction of the enemies of Christ; who shall be punished with an everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power. Indeed the judgment will be just; for *this is the condemnation: the thing that will condemn, That light is come into the world, and men love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil.* The goodness, the mercy, the love of God are such, that if any perish, it will be owing to their own stupid and perverse obstinacy. It is certain that God is not the cause of any man's damnation; seeing that Christ hath tasted death for every man, and gives times and seasons for all men to be saved.

6. He adds, *And I will give him the morning star.* A precious gift indeed! But what is the morning star? Undoubtedly it must mean a precious Christ, as he is called *the day-star*,* the star that

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* Jer. xix.

† 2 Peter i. 19.

ushers in the day ; and he says of himself, *I am the bright and morning star.** By giving him the *morning star*, we may understand his giving him the full enjoyment of Christ, and all which Christ has purchased for him. As the apostle says to conquering saints, *All are yours ; whether Paul, or Apollos, Cephas, or the world ; or life, or death, or things present, or things to come ; all are yours, and ye are Christ's.†* Glorious donation indeed ! O may we all ensure it ! What can estimate the inheritance of the saints in light ! It contains the unsearchable riches of Christ ; and an inheritance which is incorruptible and undefiled, and which fadeth not away ; reserved in heaven for them who are kept by the power of God through faith unto sure salvation. But perhaps the words may be understood more emblematically. If the church of Thyatira has any typical meaning, or does refer to the time assigned it ; then the meaning is, Be thou faithful to the end of this dark season of apostacy, and I will give thee the honor of ushering in the blessed day of the Reformation, as the morning star ushers in the natural day ; and as the morning grows brighter and brighter till the sun rises, so shall the Reformation ; till at length the bright sun of the millennial glory shall arise ; and all clouds shall be dispelled. Lord hasten on that blessed time. Even so, Lord Jesus, come quickly !

7. Such

* Rev. xxii. 16.

† 1 Cor. iii. 21, 22, 23.

7. Such as look upon these churches in an emblematical sense, suppose the church of Thyatira to be an emblem of the state of things from 1240 to 1520: if so, it takes in the Waldenses and Albigenes, the first reformers from popery; though I cannot see how they can be chargeable with the corrupt Jezabel, that is, allowing of popery, or corrupt doctrines or practices; seeing it was for bearing an honest testimony against those abominations, and not complying with them, which brought such accumulated series of sufferings upon them; insomuch, that it is said by some writers that above a million were destroyed in France alone.* But even in that suffering period of the church there might be some relics of popery, as is manifestly the case with some who profess to have sprung from those morning stars of the Reformation: But, as we know old customs, however absurd, are not easily broken off, therefore it was not to be wondered at if a tinge of the old cask remained for some time. However, Jehovah will have a pure church, and therefore freely reproves what is wrong, in order that it may be rectified; and hence we see that ministers who are the guardians of the doctrines and discipline of the church should exert themselves to pluck up every weed as soon as possible. Not but great care should be taken that while the tares are plucked up we do not root up the wheat with them. They need much prudence, much heavenly-mindedness, who have the government of

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* Burton's Essays, page 270.

the church; nothing heady, nothing rash, should appear in such as feed Christ's lambs. O the work of discipline is great! the government of the church is important indeed! Preaching is a work of importance, but it is nothing to the government of the church. In public speaking we address a congregation in the general, and that will be the case let the minister be ever so pointed, seeing he cannot call men by their names; but in discipline we have to do with individuals, and their particular cases, and must deal with them accordingly: and here we shall find men of a very obstinate and untractable turn, and yet there may be something good which we would willingly preserve, so that they may be saved at last. Herein what wisdom, prudence, and patience are necessary!

8. To conclude. Let the growing excellencies of this church be well attended to and duly imitated; and let the blemishes be shunned. It is for that purpose that both are set before us. In this we see the impartiality of the sacred writers; they give us both the dark side and the bright; so that we may chuse the good and refuse the evil; and thus patiently run our christian race, denying ourselves and taking up our cross; for hereunto we are called. Whatever was written aforetime by the sacred penmen was undoubtedly written for our instruction, caution, encouragement, or admonition. Therefore, he that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

LECTURE

LECTURE VIII.

REV. ii. 23.

And all the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts: and I will give unto every one of you according to your works.

WHITHER shall I go from thy Spirit? Or whither shall I flee from thy presence? said the royal psalmist. If I ascend up to heaven, thou art there; if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there: Plainly intimating that he was perfectly sensible that nothing could be hid from those flaming eyes which are in every place, beholding the evil and the good. This circumstance is much forgotten; and hence we find great care is taken to hide our designs from men, as though that would effectually secrete them from the eyes of Omniscience. I suppose there were hypocrites in this church, unknown to the angel to be such; but God declares he will bring to light the hidden things of darkness in such wise that, *all the churches shall know that he searcheth the reins and hearts*; and, as such, will act as an impartial judge. Ah, what manner of persons ought we to be? seeing we have to do with
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him to whom all secrets are fully known. By reins we may understand, our thoughts and imaginations; by hearts may be meant our desires, or affections; all of which are perfectly known to the head of the church, whose eyes are as a flaming fire. From hence we may consider,

I. What the Lord is, *A searcher of reins and hearts.*

II. What he does, *Gives to every one according to their works.*

III. It is for the benefit of the churches to know this.

I. 1. When Jehovah is said to search, or try, it is speaking after the manner of men, to signify his making manifest to ourselves or others what is within us; for he is under no necessity to make any inquiry, seeing all things are naked and open to him with whom we have to do. The darkness hideth not from him, but the darkness and light are both alike to him; but he makes use of various means to make what is necessary manifest to us.

2. He does this sometimes by his Holy Spirit, without any other means; for the Spirit searcheth all things, even the deep things of God; and, much more, what is in fallen man. It is true, the heart is deceitful; and, above all things, desperately wicked; and who can know it? Men can only judge by circumstances, or outward appearances, and this led even wise Samuel to mistake in the choice of a king, till the Lord rectified the mistake: *For man,*
faith

faith Jehovah, *looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart.** Wicked men can gloss over deeds and hide the basest designs; but the righteous God can bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and is the most competent judge; seeing it is he who searcheth the hearts and reins.† Jeremiah complaining of the devices of his enemies, yet knowing the simplicity, integrity, and sincerity of his own conduct; as such he makes his appeal to God: *But O Lord of hosts, which judgest righteously, that triest the reins and hearts, let me see thy vengeance on them: for unto thee I have revealed, or committed, my cause.* He makes the same appeal, and for the same reason, elsewhere.‡ Solomon had the same object in view in the dedicating the temple, and in praying for the people: he says, *Hear thou in heaven, thy dwelling-place, and forgive, and do, and give, to every man according to his ways: whose heart thou knowest: for thou, even thou only, knowest the hearts of all the children of men.§* Such thoughts of God are honourable, and profitable to mankind.

3. God our Saviour searches the reins and hearts by his word, either read or preached: Hence the apostle observes, *The word of God is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword: piercing, even to the dividing asunder the soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow; and*

* 1 Sam. xvi. 7. † Ps. vii. 9. ‡ Jer. xi. 20. xvii. 10. xx. 12.

§ 1 Kings viii. 39.

*and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.** Many a sinner has been cut to the heart by this word, and made to cry earnestly for mercy; and many an evil which lay concealed, has been discovered by this candle of the Lord. It is mighty to the pulling down the strong-holds of the enemy. It is like a fire, and like a hammer which breaks the rocks in pieces. It is the voice of the Son of God, which wakes the dead. Spies, corrupt judges, informers, hypocrites, raging persecutors, have all been made to feel the force of this all-powerful engine. *All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, and thoroughly furnished to every good work.†* It is, therefore, an excellent quality in a minister, to be mighty in the scriptures; and, like a wise householder, bring out of his treasury things new and old; so shall he be the happy means of making many wise unto salvation:

4. Our Lord often makes use of sharp crosses and trials for the same valuable end; and by that means discovers to man what is in himself. It is a just observation, that "a death-bed is a detector of the heart:" and oftentimes sickness is the same. Therefore the Psalmist says, *Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now have I kept thy word. It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I might learn thy righteous judgments.‡* Multitudes, now in glory, are

* Heb. iv. 12. † 2 Tim. iii. 16, 17. ‡ Ps. cxix. 67—71.

are witnesses of this great truth ; and multitudes are daily verifying the same. There are few that can bear prosperity ; it is a sail which few can carry : they have not sufficient ballast, and therefore overset. The prosperity of fools destroys them. As many as our Saviour loves, he rebukes and chastens. And hence he says, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked. Afflictions, whether in person or circumstances, have a tendency to bring a man home to himself, and to give an edge to his conscience, and thereby discover what otherwise would lie concealed : therefore God withholds in mercy ; yea, he afflicts in mercy ; so that the well-known lines may be more than a poetical flight :

“ Good when he gives, supremely good ;

Nor less when he denies ;

Ev'n crosses from his sovereign hand

Are blessings in disguise.”

Prosperity generally repels us from ourselves, and, in a great measure, shuts up the inner man ; but the ebb of adversity makes bare the channel, and brings the soul back to itself, creates something of self-inquiry, and discovers that there is something wanting which only God can supply. Therefore, they are wholesome crosses, needful and necessary disappointments ; and, like a fire to consume the dross, or a purifying wind to drive the chaff and smoke away.

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5. By strong temptations God tries his people. Thus God tried Abraham when he commanded him to take Isaac, his son and offer him up for a burnt-offering. He tried his faith and love, and they were found sterling; so that by works his faith was found perfect.* In like manner he expostulates with Israel by Moses in the following words: *Did ever people hear the voice of God speaking out of the fire as thou hast heard, and live? Or hath God assayed to go and take him a nation from the midst of another nation, by TEMPTATIONS, by signs, and by wonders, and by war, and by a mighty hand, and by an out-stretched arm, and by great terrors; according to all that the Lord your God did for you in Egypt before your eyes. Unto thee it was shewed, that thou mightest know that the Lord he is God; and that there is none besides him.†* That is the end of every trial, namely, That we may know, in a saving sense, that Jehovah is God alone. It was to try David that Satan was permitted to tempt him to number Israel; and by which David got a clearer discovery of himself.‡ For the same purpose God tried Hezekiah, in the affair of the ambassadors of the king of Babylon, that he might know, (or make known to him) all that was in his heart.§ In all the dispensations of his providence the faithful soul can say, *He knoweth the way that I take, and when he hath tried me I shall come forth as gold.¶*

Thus

* Gen. xxii. † Deut. iv. 33—36. ‡ 1 Chron. xxi. 1. § 2 Chron. xxxii. 31. ¶ Job xxiii. 10.

Thus he tried Peter, took down his vain confidence, and made him think more humbly of himself. Even lest a Paul should be lifted up above measure, his gracious Lord permits the messenger of Satan to buffet him. So that if needs be we may be in heaviness through manifold temptations; that the trial of our faith being much more precious than gold, may be found to the praise and glory of God. But we must remember, that we have a great High Priest, who has been tempted in all points like unto us, yet without sin; and who is able to succour them that are tempted; and will with every temptation make a way for them to escape. The design of trial is not destruction, but salvation. The temptations of Satan shall all work for good in the end, and the tried believer shall sing aloud; nay, In all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.*

II. 1. Having considered the Lord the searcher of reins and hearts, we are now to inquire what he is said to do; that is, to give every man according to his works. Not for their works, but according to them; for there is no merit in the case. In point of justification works have nothing to do; seeing it is to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, whose faith is counted for righteousness: But with respect to final retribution, God is not unmindful of the works of faith and labour of love which have been done for his name's

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* Rom. viii, 3

fake. A cup of cold water given to a disciple shall in no degree lose its reward; for our Lord will say, Inasmuch as ye did it to one of the least of these, ye did it unto me. Such as sow to the flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; and such as sow to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting; and therefore we are exhorted not to be weary in well-doing; for in due season we shall reap if we faint not.

2. We may observe, there are works of piety done to the glory of God; such as, trying to promote his glory in the salvation of poor perishing sinners; and in this we may be instrumental in many respects: Our God hears prayer, especially that which goeth not out of feigned lips; hence we see how God permitted Abraham to intercede for Sodom,* and Moses in the behalf of the offending Israelites;† David for Jerusalem;‡ and Daniel for the Jewish nation.§ It is not easy to tell how the Almighty will be moved by the intercessions of poor worms of the earth; but so it is. Hence we find even St. Paul oftentimes intreating the prayers of the people. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much; and therefore is a work of piety which God approves of. It is true, there are formal, hypocritical prayers; but that is nothing to the purpose; there is no good thing but what may be abused. Men may make long prayers to cover base designs, or to be seen of men, or think they shall be heard for much speaking; but that will avail nothing; yet our privilege
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* Gen. xviii. † Exod. xxxiii. ‡ 2 Sam. xxiv. 17. § Dan. ix.

and duty is to pray without ceasing; in every thing by prayer and supplication to let our requests be made known to God: yea, to make prayers, supplications, and intercessions for all men.

3. To use our influence in promoting the gospel, by erecting places of worship for it to be preached in, and doing our best to encourage the ministry of the word; in labouring to support faithful ministers in the important work, and in labouring to introduce them into such places as are dark and ignorant, profane and immoral, so that sinners may be truly turned to God; using all prudent means to induce sinners to hear the word, or by putting such books into their hands as may have a tendency to open their eyes, and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God. By lovingly, yet closely, reproving sin; or by encouraging good desires wherever we see them; and, as far as we can, restraining all ungodliness. Setting up the face of religion in our families, both by practice and precept; using all means of grace, both public and private: Now these are what we may call works of piety.

4. But there are works of mercy to our fellow-creatures: Such as visiting, and according to our power, relieving the sick, or such as are in prison, or captivity. In this Job was an eminent example; which he expresses in a just vindication of himself against the heavy and unjust charges of his friends: *When the ear heard me, then it blessed me; and*

*when the eye saw me, it gave witness to me: Because I delivered the poor that cried, and the fatherless, and him that had none to help him. The blessing of him that was ready to perish came upon me: and I caused the widow's heart to sing for joy...I was eyes unto the blind, and feet was I to the lame. I was a father to the poor: and the cause which I knew not I searched out. I brake the jaws of the wicked, and plucked the spoil out of his teeth.** In short, being in any respect helpful to our fellow-creatures may be called a work of mercy; and more especially to such as are in necessity; and what our Lord will own in the great day, when he will say, *Inasmuch as ye did it unto the least of these, ye did it unto me.* It is true, things of this nature may be done out of ostentation and pride, like the Pharisees of old, who caused a trumpet to be sounded, under a pretence of calling the poor together, but in reality to proclaim their own liberality; of which our Saviour bids us *take heed.*† Such is the case with the formal hypocrite; as it is said by the poet,

“ Loudly he tunes his penitential psalms,

“ And blows a trumpet to proclaim his alms.”

But, as we must not do evil that good may come, so we must not omit doing good because there is a possibility of acting from wrong motives. For it is certain *he that knows how to do good*, and has it in his power to do it, *and does it not, to him it is sin.*

* Job xxix. 11---18.

† Matt. vi. 1.

*sin.** Perhaps the forgiving of injuries and wrongs may fall under this head; which indeed is a work of mercy in the highest sense, and what we shall be frequently called to do; even to bless them that curse us, and to do good to them that hate us, and to pray for them that despitefully use us and persecute us. This is certainly the spirit of the gospel, and what we find enforced by our Lord and his servants, both in principle and practice. *Father, forgive them,* said the crucified Jesus, when hanging upon the cross. To the same effect spake his protomartyr Stephen, almost at his last gasp: *Lord, lay not this sin to their charge: and when he had said this he fell asleep.†* Our Lord assures us, if we forgive not men their trespasses, neither will our heavenly Father forgive us. That striking parable of the servant owing his lord ten thousand talents, and being forgiven, yet would not forgive a fellow-servant an hundred pence, is much to the purpose; and our Saviour's inference from it is equally striking; *So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.‡* Therefore, if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head.§ I lay the greater stress upon this, because I fear it makes but a small part of our Christianity in the present day. Numbers are easily offend-

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* Jan. iv. 17. † Acts vii. 60. ‡ Matt. xviii. 35.

§ Rom. xii. 20.

ed, and do not strive to get rid of the offence; though they are daily saying, *Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us.* *Who so hateth his brother is a murderer*; and he that will not forgive him an injury cannot love him; therefore he must hate him, and as such *cannot have eternal life abiding in him.**

5. He whose eyes are as a flaming fire sees from what motives we act, and therefore says, *The light of the body is the eye; if, therefore, thine be single, thy whole body is full of light; but if thine eye be evil, thy whole body is full of darkness.* It has been observed, that the Pharisees made long prayers, and gave alms; but all was done to be seen of men: they had their praise of men in view, and therefore in that they had their reward. If that be the case, we are the adorers of ourselves, but have no view to the honour of God. That kind of self-adoration runs through the human race, and men have their own praise in view in every department; in wars and fightings: in the extent of conquests; in building sumptuous palaces, cities, towns, forts, and castles. In philosophical pursuits it is the same; in trade and commerce; in dress and equipage; so in what is called religion; in preaching, praying, giving to the poor, or in being liberal in the cause of religion. In all this God has pleasure in uprightness; and when we act in simplicity, it is highly acceptable in his sight. Moreover, if there is any dependence

* 1 John iii. 15.

dependence on our doings, as thinking they merit any thing, or deserve any favour at God's hands, we certainly mistake our way:—there is no joining our filthy garments to Christ's seamless coat. Christ will have no sharers in his glorious undertakings. No; the song in glory must not be, *Worthy are we and the Lamb*, but, *Worthy is the Lamb* alone, to receive honour and glory; for he alone was slain, and hath redeemed us to God by his own blood. When we have done all the things commanded us, we can only say, *We are unprofitable servants.*

6. Our Lord sees the difficulties which attend our endeavouring to promote his glory; for I am persuaded, we can do very little for God, but we must expect to meet with various obstructions in our duty. We see what troubles Moses, Samuel, David, Hezekiah, Nehemiah, Zerubbabel, and Daniel met with; though they were all princes or governors, yet it required no small exertion, no small resolution, to pursue the path of duty. We see that our blessed Lord had both men and devils up in arms against him; and so had his prime ministers. They found their way exceeding rough, not only from avowed enemies, but from professed or pretended friends. However, amidst all, the grace of our Lord Jesus was sufficient for them, and it will be sufficient for us; so that we may have our strength proportioned to our day. Let the soldiers of Christ put their armour on; let them look unto the Rock of ages, so that they may prevail, find grace to help
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in time of need ; so shall they triumph over all the powers of earth and hell.

III. I am now to consider, that it is for the benefit and advantage of all the churches, to know that the Lord searcheth the reins and hearts.

1. To stir them up to greater diligence in their heavenly vocation. Alas, we are apt to loiter on our way, and whatever is calculated to rouse us must be regarded as an advantage. Soldiers are thought to make the greatest exertions under the immediate eye of their commander ; and, in the general, servants require the attentive eye of their master, both to direct and quicken them. That we need divine direction in our heavenly calling is most certain ; and we are, too often, in the habit of eye-servants, and need the stimulating presence of our God to quicken our tardy pace. I perceive this consideration had great weight with the Psalmist, when he cried out, *O Lord, thou hast searched me, and known me. Thou knowest my sitting down and my uprising, thou understandest my thought afar off. Thou compassest my path, and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word in my tongue, but lo, O Lord, thou knowest it altogether. Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid thine hand upon me.** These are awful thoughts, and thoughts that should never forsake us ; and seeing it is so, what is the effect which they should have upon our minds ? Truly, that we should lay aside every weight,

* Ps. cxxxix. 1---5.

weight, and the sin which doth most easily beset us, and run with vigour and patience the race which is set before us. Solomon is every where severe upon the sluggard, and appears to have been a great friend to activity. *The sluggard longeth and hath nothing; but the soul of the diligent shall be made fat.** Hence the vineyard of the slothful man was all grown over with thorns, and nettles covered the face thereof, and the stone-wall thereof was broken down.† Hence the apostle says, that ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises.‡

2. This sense of our Lord's omniscience is of use to encourage us under various difficulties and trials, which will occur in our pilgrimage. But when we are certain that he that knows all things sees them, and as he can do all things, he will not fail to help in time of need, it must animate and comfort their minds. Many are the trials and difficulties of a traveller to Zion, and oftentimes they are ready to faint on their way; but, knowing that the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, Faith says, *God is our refuge and strength, a present help in time of trouble.§* Christ saw the disciples toiling in the sea, and conflicting with the stormy waves; but he kept them in view, and came in time to their relief: and surely he is the same in counsel and in might; years impair not the Most High. To encourage his saints he says, *Fear thou not, for I am with thee: be not dismayed.*

* Pro. xiii. 4. † Pro. xxiv. 30, 31. ‡ Heb. vi. 12. § Ps. xlv. 1.

*dismayed, I am thy God: I will strengthen thee, yea, I will help thee, yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.** He never loses sight of such as hang upon him. Can a woman forget her sucking child? not only neglect it, but even so far sink beneath the brute as to forget it? Yes, there are such monsters in human form; yet, says the Lord, *I will not forget thee.†* The Psalmist encouraged himself in this thought: hence he says, *I have set the Lord always before me: he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved.‡* Therefore, to this end our Lord encourages his servants with that great promise, *Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world.§*

3. It is of use to know our Saviour's omniscience, that the partial opinion of poor short-sighted mortals may weigh the less with us; and the fear of man, which bringeth a snare, may have the less influence. I believe it is the duty of every believer to walk circumspectly; to give no just occasion of offence; yea, to take great care that our good be not evil-spoken of. Thus much we owe to God and man; and herein St. Paul was a notable example; for, says he, *If meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world stands, lest I make my brother to offend.¶* Read the fourteenth chapter to the Romans throughout. We certainly ought to have a tender reverential regard for the comfort and peace

* Isa. xli. 10. † Chap. xlix. 45. ‡ Ps. xvi. 8. § Mat. xxviii. 9.

¶ 1 Cor. viii. 13.

peace of mankind. But, if after all our care and pains, men will censure and judge us, we must then commit ourselves and our cause to him that judgeth righteously; being satisfied that our work is with the Lord, and our judgment is with our God; and we are assured, that *he will bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good or evil.**

4. It is of use to the churches to know this attribute in our living Head, that it may be made known to others. Men, in the general, forget that the eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good. And hence the crafty dealer, the pilfering thief, the shop-lifter, the nimble pick-pocket, all think the Deity like themselves; yea, the vile adulterer and adultress wait for the twilight, and then fancy no eye seeth them; or they suppose that a stone wall will hide them from his eyes, which are like a flaming fire. The author of the *Refined Courtier* relates a remarkable story. A pious gentleman was moved with pity for an unhappy woman, and felt himself much inclined to attempt reclaiming of her, and therefore adopted the following singular method. He went and offered his service to her as a gallant, provided she would bring him to a place so secret as to seclude them from every eye. This she readily promised, and led him to a very remote apartment, and assured him all was safe there, for no eye could see them. But, said he, God sees us. The thought struck her; and from thence she saw her

* Eccl. xii. 14.

her wretched state, forsook her lewdness, and became a sincere penitent. O, it would be of singular use, were this great truth deeply impressed upon their minds. Let poor sinners sport themselves with their own deceivings, yet let them seriously consider, *there is no darkness or shadow of death where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves.** For, *if I should say, surely the darkness shall cover me, even the darkness shall be light about me. Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee : but the night shineth as the day : The darkness and the light are both alike to thee.†* These are awful thoughts ; but not more awful than true, and that every presumptuous sinner will find in due time. God says of the wicked, *Though they dig into hell, thence shall mine hand take them ; and though they should climb up to heaven, thence will I bring them down.‡* Rocks and mountains falling on them will not hide them from him before whose eyes hell and destruction are without a covering.

6. This knowledge is needful for the detecting of hypocrites. The wisest of men may be imposed upon, as we see in many instances. Ahithophel was once David's right-hand man ; but he appears unsound at heart,§ and his mischief returned upon his own head. It is thought, that it was of him that David complained so heavily in the fifty-fifth Psalm, whom he calls, *a man, mine equal, and mine acquaintance. We took sweet counsel together, and walked into*

* Job xxxiv. 22. † Ps. cxxxix. 11, 12. ‡ Amos ix. 2. § 2 Sam. xvii.

into the house of God in company. Simon Magus, for a time, passed for a believer; and perhaps many simple souls thought him a mighty acquisition to the church; but the searcher of reins and hearts saw his real state, and discovered that he was in the gall of bitterness and the bond of iniquity.* The church will be pestered with such, but God knows their hearts, and will sooner or later bring their deeds to light. *For what is the hope of the hypocrite when God takes away his soul?*† There is much need for us to examine ourselves whether we be in the faith; yea, for every man to prove his own work, that he may have the cause of rejoicing in himself, and not in another. Be not deceived, God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap. No hypocrite can either overcome the strength of Israel, nor deceive him: *With him is strength and wisdom: the deceived and the deceiver are his.*‡ That is, he is perfectly acquainted with both one and the other; the simplicity of one, and the craftiness of the other. Indeed he taketh the wise in their own craftiness. These reflections may excite each of us to cry out, Lord, search and try me, and see what way of wickedness is within me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

We learn, from the above observations, one proof of our Lord's divinity; for searching the reins and hearts is a prerogative which he claims wholly to himself; and Solomon ascribes that honour to him

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with

* Acts viii.

† Job xxvii. 8.

‡ Job. xii. 16.

§ 1 Kings viii 29.

with great propriety. But this prerogative is claimed by the Head of the church in the text; and truly he has a right to it; for he thought it no robbery to be equal with God, though he appeared in the form of a servant. Indeed every attribute of the Deity is ascribed to him; and he made good that claim by the works which he did; these works testify of him. I think this is not a speculative point, but the very foundation upon which the church is built; if this fail, all which is built upon it must inevitably fall. The mystery I cannot comprehend, nor can I comprehend my own soul; but I must not turn infidel for that. I therefore adore him in whom the fullness of the Godhead dwelleth bodily.

2. How little the judgment of men ought to weigh with us. Only let us take heed to act uprightly before God, and as inoffensively as possible before men, so that our good be not evil spoken of; and then if we be evil spoken of or slandered, leave our concerns with him who searcheth the reins and hearts; for in time he will thoroughly plead our cause. In this our blessed Lord has *left us an example that we should follow his steps; who did no sin, nor was guile found in his mouth; who when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously.* We find Job was judged and condemned; and most likely the hard speeches of his mistaken friends might sound far and wide; and the heavy charges might pass current for a season; but

Jehovah

Jehovah saw the uprightness and integrity of his heart, and made his keen accusers bow down to him. The same was the case with David, both before and after his coming to the throne of Israel. We see how harshly his own brother censured him; and all he answered was, *What have I now done? Is there not a cause?** So we find the whole nation at times were ready to join any rebel that would take up arms against him. His only refuge was in the God of his salvation.

3. The doctrine maintained in this discourse, holds forth many motives to diligence in the work of God, especially to ministers, seeing they have the eye of their Master continually upon them. On one hand he is a present help in every time of need, and can and will furnish them with every thing they want. Wisdom is what they continually need, yea, the wisdom that is from above, not that serpentine cunning which operates in worldly maxims; but the wisdom which is pure, peaceable, gentle and easy to be intreated; full of mercy and good fruits; without partiality and without hypocrisy. Do they want this? They have the Sun of Righteousness, the light of the world with them, who can make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight. Do they want reproof, encouragement, power, life or comfort? In him all fulness dwells, and from that fulness their every want may be supplied. Let them read attentively what is said

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to

* 1 Sam. xvii. 28, 29.

to the angels of the several churches, in which we find both caution, encouragement, and reproof; all of which are needful in their place. Let all who read the scriptures diligently consider, that the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect towards him.* Yea, let each remember, that the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayers. But the face of the Lord is against them that do evil, to cut off the remembrance of them from off the earth.†

* 2 Chron. xvi. 9.

† Psa. xxxiv. 15, 16.

LECTURE IX.

REV. iii. 1—7.

And unto the angel of the church in Sardis, write: These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars: I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead. Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God. Remember therefore how thou hast received, and heard, and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee. Thou hast a few names even in Sardis, which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy. He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment, and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

SARDIS appears to have been a place of little note, either in sacred or profane history. This is

the only place in which we read of it in the sacred writings, except the name in the first chapter; and I do not remember reading of it in any profane writer, only a late traveller says, it is about thirty-three miles from Thyatira. Nor can we tell by whom the gospel was first preached there. Things appear to have been in a poor, languid state; and no wonder, when the angel, the Pastor himself had a name that he lived but was dead; such a minister is sure to have a dead flock. Indeed it is no easy matter to regain the life that is lost, and yet how hard a matter is it to retain the first love? I think there are but very few who do retain it, and it is certain there is need of much watchfulness to maintain our ground. Many are our opposers; therefore we have abundant need to take heed lest any man fail of the grace of God. Outside religion *only*, avails little, God surveys the heart: indeed religion must have its seat there, or, a name, a form, a sentiment will avail very little. It is much to be lamented that so little of the essentials appear even in such as profess religion; so little love, meekness, patience, simplicity, uprightness, sincerity and truth. One is a great professor, another a dictator, another a casuist or a critic; but what avails it all if the love of God is wanting? In such a case if the spirit and life of religion are wanting, we are only like the dry bones when formed into bodies, but there was no life in them.* Names or sects avail.

* Ezek. xxxvii. 9.

avail nothing without Christ in us the hope of glory.

I shall treat this epistle as I have done the former, that is,

First, Go through it in an expository way.

Secondly, Make some general reflections.

I. 1. We have our Lord's glorious title. *Writes these things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars.* The term, seven Spirits, includes all the operations of the ever blessed Spirit of God; and we are informed the Spirit was given the man Christ Jesus without measure; and therefore all the various gifts and graces are at his disposal. It is the office of that blessed Spirit to enlighten the understanding, and convince the conscience; to animate and quicken the dead soul; to strengthen and confirm the inner man; to purify the soul from all its filthiness; to lead and guide it into all truth; to make intercession with unutterable groans, and seal us unto the day of eternal redemption. Now we need this heavenly agent in all those various operations, or we cannot be the sons of God; for if any man have not the Spirit of Christ he is none of his; but as many as are led by the Spirit of God they are the sons of God.—Now our blessed Lord has not only the various gifts and graces at his disposal, but even the instruments which are to be actuated thereby; and therefore it is said, *he hath the seven stars*: that is all the faithful ministers; for as the seven spirits imply all the offices

offices and operations of the heavenly paraclete, so seven stars imply all the ministers or angels of the church of Christ. These he may with propriety be said to have, in that it is he that qualifies them for their work, and calls them to it and supports them in it: likewise it is he that gives success to their labours, and will give them their reward; and as an encouragement he says, *Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.* And to every faithful labourer in his vineyard, his exhortation is, *Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.*

2. The fair outside which this angel or church might have: *Thou hast a name that thou livest.* In times of public tranquillity, when the rod of persecution lies dormant, we need not wonder at this; but that it should be so when they carried their lives in their hands is very surprising; and that was evidently the case at the time when these epistles were written. *Thou hast a name;* a goodly outside; others think well of thee, and thou thinkest well of thyself; so much the worse. Some may assume this name from their supposed orthodoxy, as very likely it might be the case here; for we do not find either the angel or church at Sardis charged with any fundamental error in doctrine. I doubt many stick fast here, and are not a little elated in their station. Knowledge is good, especially if it is sanctified; but alas, knowledge without life and love, is but the quality of a devil. Here we have need to take
care.

care that we do not rest in any creed, true or false.— Some obtain this name by their being in some church fellowship, and the true church no doubt; and therefore look upon themselves as secure as Noah in the ark, especially if they be attentive to all the modes, forms and ceremonies of that church or society. But such should remember, there was a Ham in the ark, though the family of the whole world did but consist of eight persons. There was a Judas in the school of Christ, though his number was but twelve; yea there was a Simon in the church, at the time it was under the lash of persecution, and if so, need we wonder that either hypocrites or self-deceivers should worm themselves into the church of God now when persecution is ceased. Others therefore may obtain this name from their outward regularity, and thereby make a fair shew in the flesh. I suppose this was the case with the Pharisees in our Lord's time, as well as many who were the troublers of St. Paul, and of whom he complains very feelingly. Certainly we are called to walk very circumspectly, and every one that walks with our Saviour will do so, but it is from a principle of love within, and hence they have no confidence in the flesh.

3. Christ's impartial judgment, *Thou art dead*. Like the fig-tree which our Lord came to, there were fair leaves but no fruit.* Perhaps this church was not dead in an absolute sense, but comparatively;

* Mark xi. 13.

tively ; for we read in ver. 2, there were some things still alive, but they were in a languishing state, so that they *were ready to die*. They were at *ease in Zion*, or settled too much upon their lees. Indeed, it is a state which we have all need to take care of, or we may easily slide into that general numbness, and then the fruitful land is turned into barrenness. God is not glorified in that we bring little or no fruit. The Head of the church sees this, and has great cause to be jealous over us. But there is no deceiving of him, nor will he flatter us ; but will, by some means or other, apprise us of danger, so that we may escape for life. Achan thought he had the wedge of gold and the Babylonish garment secure ; but the eyes of flame saw them, and was determined to bring all to light. God will not connive at iniquity, much less sanction it in his own children ; no, he will visit their iniquities with a rod, and their sins with stripes ; and in all things his judgment is according to truth. What manner of persons ought we to be in all manner of conversation ! Like the king's daughter, all glorious within, and whose covering is of wrought gold.* O, may we examine ourselves, whether we be in the faith !

4. Christ's counsel or charge to them ; *Bewareful, and strengthen the things that remain, which are ready to die*. From hence it appears, that there were some things remaining which were pleasing to God, though in a declining state ; some relics of faith and

* Ps. xlv. 13.

and love, and a good conscience, and therefore would have them preserved. In order to this, they are exhorted to be *watchful*, watchful over themselves, the cares and snares of the world, the cunning wiles of Satan, or whatever militates against the grace of God. In like manner there is much need to watch against lukewarm professors, inasmuch as we are in danger of being more hurt by them than by all the wickedness which is in the world. Such are often the troublers in Israel, hatching parties, and creating disturbance in the world, and in the church of God. Mark them that cause divisions in the church, and shun them; for they are enemies in her own bowels. Moreover, we should watch all opportunities of doing all the good we can, both to the bodies and souls of men, which is the case with such as are much alive to God. They omit no opportunities of helping their poor brethren in temporal matters, either from their own ability, or the influence which they may have with others. Nor will they let any opportunity slip of instructing, advising, comforting, or reproving any we have any intercourse with. *Strengthen the things which remain*, is another part of the admonition. The things that remain;—the faith, love, life, zeal, patience, which are wrought in the heart by the power of the Holy Ghost; and, like the fire upon the altar, was to be kept burning by the ministration of the priests; it was never to go out.* Now every true believer is a priest

* Lev. vi. 13.

priest in the church of Christ, and more especially the ministers of the gospel; and should use every means to keep the fire of love burning, that it may not be extinguished. For, although we are justified freely by grace, and sanctified by the operation of the Holy Ghost, yet, we are called to use the grace which is so freely given us. This is held forth in the parable of the talents. He that improved what was given him increased what he had, and he met with the approbation of his Lord; but he who did not improve his talent, forfeited the same, and was disgraced; and the church of Sardis was in great danger of falling into the same disgrace.

5. The complaint is, *I have not found thy works perfect before God.* I doubt the cause of this complaint is too general. The word, *perfect*, must be understood in a qualified sense, or I doubt the greater part of professors will fall into the condemnation here spoken of. Absolute perfection is found nowhere but in the Deity; but there is a qualified perfection appertaining to every thing in nature, and may be applied to angels, men, animals, and vegetables, and must suit the nature of each. Thus a perfect flower is not a perfect eagle; and a perfect eagle is not a perfect lion; a perfect lion is not a perfect man; a perfect man is not a perfect angel; and a perfect angel is not a perfect Deity. Works may be said to be perfect when they are pleasing to God, done according to his will, and in his own time and manner. Likewise, we must observe, it is expected,

ted according to what a man hath, and not according to what he hath not. He does not expect the improvement of five talents where he has but given one; nor a talent from the widow who had but two mites. In building the tabernacle the Israelites brought such things as they were in possession of; namely, precious stones, gold, silver, purple, fine linen, silk, and scarlet; and they that had no better, brought goats' hair, which was accepted. Now whereinsoever the imperfections of the works of this angel or this church lay, we may be assured the complaint was just and equitable. And let every one that hears, or reads, take heed they do not fall into the same condemnation. He farther admonishes, *Remember, therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent.* Hence it is plain, things were sadly on the decline. There was a time when they had received from the bountiful Head of the church wisdom, life, power, love, and purity; and then it was well with them. There was a good understanding between them and their Lord; so it was with Israel; for thus saith the Lord: *I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown. Israel was holiness unto the Lord, and the first-fruits of his increase.** In the present memento there is something of encouragement, to intimate there was a time when they and their works were highly pleasing to

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* Jer. ii. 2, 3.

God ; and they are reminded of the great truths which they had heard, and the manner in which they had heard and received them ; so that they were admonished to hear and receive as they had done in the beginning, when all were acceptable to God and profitable to their own souls. It is thus the Apostle tried to rally the fainting Hebrews : *But call to remembrance, says he, the former days, in which, after ye were illuminated, ye endured a great fight of affliction :** exactly corresponding with the admonition in the text ; so that every prudent method was taken to marshal those scattered forces again. Every prudent mean is made use of to enlighten the mind, influence the will, move the affections, and stimulate the conscience ; so that God may justly inquire, *What could I have done for my vineyard that I have not done ?*

6. Here is a threatening danger : *If thou, therefore, after all the helps and warnings which I have given thee, shall not watch, I will come on thee as a thief ; and thou shalt not know in what hour I will come upon thee.* This is plainly the style of our Lord, which he uses in various parts of his word, often alluding to the irruptions of a thief ; to signify the suddenness as well as the unexpectedness of the time of his coming. The coming threatened plainly intimates some judgments or calamities which he would assuredly bring upon them ; for that is and will be the case with such as abuse their privileges.

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* Heb. x. 32.

The Lord waits patiently, and uses every prudent method, that the barren fig-tree may bring forth fruit; but if all be vain, then the axe must be laid to the root, and the fruitless tree must be cut down. The coming spoken of must refer to some sudden stroke of his rod, either by calamities or persecutions. He speaks to the same purpose elsewhere, that *as a snare the judgments should come upon them that dwell upon the face of the earth.* Behold, I come as a thief: blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame.†* The awful judgments which he brought upon Jerusalem were very unexpected; as was the flood which swept away the inhabitants of the old world: They were building, planting, eating, drinking, marrying, and giving in marriage; till the flood overtook one set of transgressors, and the fire consumed the other. Therefore our Lord's inference is highly necessary: *Be ye also ready: for at such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh.* Or in another place, *Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things which shall come to pass, and stand before the Son of man.‡*

7. In the midst of general deadness there were a few blessed exceptions: *Thou hast a few names, even in Sardis, which have not defiled their garments, and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy.* *A few names*, that is, a few persons,

* Luke xxi. 35.

† Rev. xvi. 15.

‡ Luke xxi. 36.

sons, *who had not defiled their garments.* They were not defiled with corrupt doctrines, such as were prevalent at that time; especially that of the Gnosticks, which opened a door to all manner of licentiousness; which, very likely, might have tainted the morals of many in this church: but, however, there were a few who had preserved their integrity. If they retained the purity of doctrine, so they retained their experience, very like their first love, and therefore had neither made shipwreck of faith nor a good conscience. This is indeed a high encomium of these few excellent ones, who “against example were resolutely good,” and “faithful found among the faithless.” O it is a blessing to retain our simplicity in times of general corruptions. Such are like stars in winter-nights, whose lights shine with the greatest splendor. Their light did also shine in their conversation; so that they were not lights hid in a bushel. Keeping the doctrine, experience, and practice of the faith, the Lord encourages them with an extraordinary promise, *They shall walk with me in white.* Precious promise! This, I presume, refers to a state of glory; as indeed do most, if not all, the promises made to the churches in these epistles. But it will be worth while to consider this promise and the reason more largely in a separate discourse, and for the present pass it by.

II. 1. We now come to the general promise: *To him that overcometh*, whatever opposes his progress in pure religion, let it be error in judgment, dead-
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ness in experience, or evil practices, *the same shall be clothed in white raiment*: White garments were deemed an honourable kind of clothing in those days, and worn only by princes, triumphant generals, or high priests; and therefore the highest marks of worldly honour are selected to point out the honour reserved in glory, for such as conquer all adverse power through the blood of the cross. Moreover, those white garments are emblems of innocence, and such as shall be made manifest to all when our Lord shall come to judge the world in righteousness. They are also expressive of the highest degree of purity that can appertain to disembodied spirits. They are those robes which are washed and made white in the blood of the Lamb. They are that clothing of wrought gold in which the daughters of Zion shall be adorned; so that *although they have lain among the pots, they shall be as the wings of a dove, covered with silver, and her feathers of yellow gold.** Again he declares, *I will not blot his name out of the book of life.* But here a query may be started: Can any name be blotted out of that book which is once in it? Let the answer be from him who keeps that book. We find, in the book of Exodus, that the people had provoked the Lord most highly in making the golden calf; Moses was deeply afflicted for the dishonour done to the Divine Majesty; and yet felt a love of pity and compassion to the sinful people: He therefore returns to Jehovah, and cries, *Oh, this people*

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*have sinned a great sin, and have made them gods of gold. Yet now, if thou wilt, forgive their sin: and if not, blot me out, I pray thee, from thy book which thou hast written. And the Lord said unto Moses, whosoever hath sinned against me, him will I blot out of my book.** Here is a plain declaration. Much the same is that in Ezekiel, *The soul that sinneth, it shall die.†* Besides, if no name shall ever be blotted that is written in that book, the promise is a nonentity; it means nothing. To promise me what I am sure of is no encouragement at all; it is no promise. But I presume that is not the case with the matter in hand; here is a real promise that means something; and is intended as a gracious encouragement to the excellent few who had kept their garments undefiled. He adds, *And I will confess his name before my Father.* This was no small degree of encouragement to these precious souls, and to all in like circumstances who are labouring to keep themselves unspotted from the world. The confessing them, means his owning them for his sheep; yea, as his brethren; and fixing them in the heavenly station which he has provided for them. As our divine poet sweetly sings:

JESUS, my God, I know his name
His name is all my trust;
Nor will he put my soul to shame,
Nor let my hopes be lost.

Then.

* Exod. xxxii. 33.

† Ezek. xviii. 4.

Then will he own my worthless name,
 Before his Father's face;
 And in the New Jerusalem
 Appoint my soul a place."

2. We see it is possible to have a name that we live, and yet be dead in the sight of God. This should make each of us jealous over ourselves with godly jealousy, lest there should be a mistake, or lest any man should fail of the grace of God. Here we should awake and trim our lamps, and see that there be oil in our vessels. The exhortation of St. Paul on this head is very needful, and very important: *Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves; know ye not yourselves that Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates. But let a man prove his own work; then shall he have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another. Be not deceived; God is not mocked; whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. He that soweth to his flesh, shall of his flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit, shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.** The church might well say, *Let us search and try our ways; and if there is a departure from him, let us turn to the Lord.†* Our evidence cannot be too clear; our election cannot be made too sure. Indeed, a name is no more than a painted tree, or a painted fire; one yields no fruit, and the other yields no heat. Nor can we yield any fruit to God without life. There is no grow-
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* 2 Cor. xiii. 5. Gal. vi. 4-9. † Lam. iii. 40.

ing in grace without life; there is no running our christian race without life. This made David cry out, *Quicken me, according to thy word.*

3. Specious pretences cannot skreen us from the eyes of God; nor can they skreen us from his wrath, or the threatenings of his word. Dead sacrifices under the law were abomination to God. The lame and the blind were sure to be rejected. And what are all our pretensions to religion while all the affections are kept from him; in such a case outward services are but offering the lame and the blind. The call of the Almighty is, my Son, my Child, give me thine heart! That is a very reasonable request. The people complained of in the 50th Psalm, and again in the 1st of Isaiah, were liberal and pompous enough in offerings and oblations, but their hearts were far from him. In like manner those complained of in the 58th chapter of Isaiah, were punctual enough in fasting, and making long prayers, but what did it avail? They were cruel, rapacious and covetous, and therefore were far from righteousness. Why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I have commanded you? said our blessed Saviour. The keeping the heart back is acting the part of Ananias and Sapphira over again. What fiery contentions have been concerning the forms of religion! which have filled the world with misery and mischief, to the destruction of the love of God, piety and pure devotion. Well might the Apostle say, I beseech you brethren, by the mercies of God, that

that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God which is your reasonable service.

4. This deadneſs ſeldom comes on all at once, and therefore care ſhould be taken againſt the very firſt beginning. A kind of ſatisfaction with what we have is often the unhappy cauſe of ſinking into deadneſs. There is no ſtanding ſtill in religion. It is like vegetation, we are either going on unto perfection, or we are decaying; therefore the ſooner the evil is detected the better; or like a leak in a ſhip it may be neglected till unavoidable ruin takes place. A diſorder, if taken at the beginning may be removed; but if neglected it may prove fatal. Coldneſs often begins in the cloſet; and as ſoon as it is felt ſhould be removed, or it is ſure to gain ground. Many ſettle in a form; their notions may be right, while the affections are dead, and then it is but the dead carcaſe of religion; the body is the walking coffin of the dead ſoul. O be jealous; keep the ſacred fire burning that it may never go out. We ſee how diſagreeable deadneſs is to the living God.

5. They who look upon theſe Epiſtles as figurative and emblematical, judge the church of Sardis to repreſent the ſtate of things from 1560 to the preſent time; ſo that we are now in the Sardian ſtate; and truly it ſeems to tally with what appears among many who name the name of Chriſt. There is need of every rousing method to quicken our
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tardy pace; so that we may emerge out of this twilight, out of this state of death to that of the life of faith, which is full of heavenly vigor, life, and immortality. As this Sardian state has been of long standing, we may hope it will not last long, and therefore is drawing to a period, and that a glorious season is swiftly approaching; some precious drops have fallen, yet the shower is much desired. But I am apprehensive much destruction will be among mankind before that event will take place. Many thrones of opposition will be cast down before the Ancient of Days will sit in his millennial glory; and the dragon, the beast and the false prophet will all unite their force, and stir up all their power to make war with the Lamb; but the Lamb shall overcome them, for he is King of kings, and Lord of lords. All must submit to the olive-branch of peace, or the stroke of justice; and they who will not be converted must be cut off; so that every knee must bow, and every tongue confess the Saviour to be Lord to the glory of the Father.

LECTURE

LECTURE X.

REV. iii. 4.

Thou hast a few names, even in Sardis, which have not defiled their garments: and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy.

IN the glorious constellation of the divine attributes, Justice and Truth bear a considerable share. Justice appears in punishing all such as persevere in their disobedience; as in the case of the sinning angels, our first parents, the old world, the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah, the Canaanites, the Israelites; and clouds of other instances. Truth appears in God fulfilling his gracious promises and designs to such as depend upon his faithfulness. This is manifest in the ample fulfilment of those promises which respect the coming of the Messiah, the gift of the Holy Spirit, and the blessed spreading of the gospel. Moreover, God makes a gracious distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not. Wilt thou destroy the righteous with the wicked? said Abraham. No, says the Almighty; and faithfully kept his word, in bringing his servant Lot from the overthrow of Sodom. Will he punish
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the righteous father for the unrighteous son? Or the righteous son for the ungodly father? No, says the Almighty, all souls are mine; and the soul that sinneth shall die. So here in this dead church there were a few gracious exceptions, and these the Lord takes notice of with distinguished approbation. These were like lillies among thornes; like wheat among tares; wise virgins among the foolish; jewels among rubbish; and as such he claims them for his own; something like the happy few in the days when *those that tempted God were delivered, and they who wrought wickedness were set up, yet such as feared the Lord spake often one to another, and the Lord hearkened, and heard, and a book of remembrance was written before him, and they shall be mine said God in the day when I make up my jewels: and I will spare them as a man spareth his own son which serveth him.** So he speaks to this cold Pastor, *thou hast a few names even in Sardis, which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy.* They were but few, yet they were entitled to his merciful regard; and he marks them out with singular approbation. Happy are we, if we are found of that blessed number. From hence I shall endeavour to consider,

First, The dignity of the persons here spoken of; the Lord says, *they are worthy.*

Secondly, The promise made to them. *They shall walk with him in white.*

Thirdly,

* Mal. iii. 16, 17.

Thirdly, Inquire how we may attain the same dignity.

I. First, I am to consider their dignity: *they are worthy.*

1. By nature no man has any worth or worthiness in him; for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. We are all as an unclean thing, and our righteousness as filthy rags; so that from the crown of the head to the sole of the foot we are full of wounds and bruises and putrifying sores. We are ignorant and stupid, in the things of God, so that the dull ox knoweth his owner, and the stupid ass his master's crib; but even an unconverted Israelite does not know, a mere nominal christian does not consider. We have all a perverse and stubborn will, repugnant in every respect to the will of God; a self-will which pursues its own way, and in effect imitates Satan, who said, *I will be like the Most High.* This will continually opposes the will of God, and as such continually follows its own foolish imagination, which is only evil and that continually. The whole train of affections are all in disorder, insomuch that we love what God hates, and we hate what he loves. We, more or less, rejoice in iniquity, and not in the truth; we sorrow like them who have no hope; and therefore it is the sorrow of the world which worketh death. We fear pain, reproach, poverty; yet little of the fear of offending God is found in us; hence our abstaining from sin is selfish, like the slave who fears the

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lash, more than the neglect of his duty. Such, like Pharoah, repent till they apprehend the danger is over, and then harden the heart again, and return with the dog to his vomit, and the washed sow to the wallowing in the mire. The mind and conscience being defiled, the thoughts and imaginations are only evil, and that continually. Such is human excellency, and such is the dignity of human nature; and every one that is feelingly sensible of this cries out in keen distress, *I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me. We are by nature children of wrath even as others.* Therefore every mouth is stopped, and all the world is become guilty before God.

2. Man can merit nothing; so far from it, that when he has done his best he hath sinned and come short of the glory of God. The law of God is exceeding broad, and demands perfect obedience from first to last. One single failure dooms the offender to everlasting misery. Moreover this awful law makes no allowance for infirmities, nor does it leave any room for repentance: no, its rigid demands are, perfect, uninterrupted, unfinning obedience from first to last. It gives no strength to perform any thing; in that sense it is weak through the flesh, through our carnal and corrupt nature, which is called flesh; hence *sawing to the flesh, living after the flesh*, and the like, is giving way to the bent of our sinful nature, and is a yielding to the law of sin which is in our members, and wars against every good

good disposition, and even overcomes: so that they who are in the flesh are so far from meriting any thing, that even they sin and come short of the glory of God; are unprofitable servants, and therefore being under the law they are under the curse. If any man could have had a claim to merit it was the Apostle Paul, seeing as touching the law, in a legal or ceremonial sense, he was blameless; but when the commandment came home, sin, that he thought was dead, revived and he died; and the commandment which was ordained to life, that is, which promised life to innocent man, he found to be death, which made him cry out; O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from this body of death? He then spies a deliverer, and exclaims with extacy, *I thank God through Christ Jesus our Lord.**

3. Then all worthiness of merit is found in a precious Christ. He has undertaken the desperate cause; for desperate it was, and desperate it would have remained if he had not engaged in it. He undertook to remove the mountain from a guilty world; to take the curse out of the way and nail it to his cross. His errand into the world was to redeem a race of lost sinners, to seek and to save that which was lost. He looked, but there was none to save, he wondered, and there was none to uphold, therefore his own arm brought salvation. Sacrifices, and burnt-offerings were rejected, but a body was prepared

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* Rom. vii. 21—25.

pared for him ; and that body was found in the likeness of sinful flesh. He gave himself a ransom for all to be testified in due time. O this is a pleasing theme ! He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities ; the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed. If by one man's disobedience many were made sinners ; by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous. If through the offence of one, judgment came upon all unto condemnation ; so by the righteousness of one the free gift is come upon all to justification.* Therefore, *worthy is the Lamb that was slain, and hath redeemed us to God by his blood, to receive blessing, honour, praise and dominion for ever.*†

4. Yet there is a sense in which the believer may be said to be worthy ; otherwise there would be no difference between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God, and him that serveth him not. The Almighty saith, *them that honour me I will honour ; and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed.*‡

There is such a thing as being faithful and unfaithful. The angels who kept their station were faithful, and therefore are found worthy to retain their high station. They who fell left their principality, they were unfaithful, and therefore are reserved in chains to the day of judgment. The man who improved his talents was found worthy to enter
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* Rom. v.

† Rev.

‡ 1 Sam. ii. 30.

into the joy of his Lord; but he that hid his talent and did not improve it was found unworthy of so great a favour. The guests who accepted the invitation to the marriage feast, and accepted the wedding garment, were found worthy; but they who rejected the invitation, and he who entered without the wedding garment were found unworthy.—There is a wise and faithful steward, whom his Lord will set over his household; and there is an unfaithful steward, who eats and drinks with the drunkard, and whom his Lord will appoint to be cut asunder, and have his portion among hypocrites and unbelievers. In this qualified sense, Joshua and Caleb were worthy to enter the promised land, while they whose carcases fell in the wilderness could not enter because of their unbelief.*

5. In the present case the worthiness consisted in keeping their garments undefiled. Which implied that they had kept the purity of our Saviour's doctrine, notwithstanding the many temptations they had to the contrary, from the corruptions of the church of Rome, and such as had not wholly thrown off her abominations. They had also kept the experimental part, which was still more to their honour; for we may retain the form of sound words, though we have not the power of them; and I deem that rather a dangerous state, and a state which we may easily slide into. Theory and experience do well together, which like the sun cause fruitfulness

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* Heb. iii. 19.

wherever they are found. If we retain the doctrinal and experimental part, we shall assuredly retain the practical part: for this is the only proof which we can give to either God or man that we are in a state of grace. The good tree will bring forth good fruit. The pure fountain will send forth pure streams. Such was the state of these precious souls. If these churches are emblematical, and that the church of Sardis represents such of the reformation as had not shook off intirely the yoke of Anti-christ, then I scruple not to say, the few names which had not defiled their garments were the *Waldenses* and *Albigenses*; for although they were a goodly company, yet in comparison of the rest they were but few. May we be numbered among them.

II. I now come to consider the promise made to them, *they shall walk with me in white*, says the glorious Head of the church.

1. This implies reconciliation; *For how can two walk together except they be agreed.** That there is a very great disagreement between God and sinful man is plain both from scripture as well as from daily experience. But blessed be our great High Priest, who hath reconciled all things unto himself by the blood of his cross; and that those who were sometimes aliens and enemies by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled in the body of his flesh through death, to present them unblameable and unproveable in his sight. Therefore such as were

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* Amos iii. 3.

afar off, are brought nigh by the blood of Christ. But then such as shall walk with Christ have thrown down their arms of rebellion, they have surrendered at discretion, and yielded to his sovereign sway. While they were enemies they were reconciled by the death of a dear Redeemer; being now reconciled they are saved by his life. They are fully reconciled to all his revealed will, and to the dispensations of his grace and providence; and it is their desire that all their powers may yield, a cheerful and interrupted obedience to him by whose blood they are redeemed, and by whose stripes they are healed.

2. This walking implies familiarity and acquaintance. We seldom walk with those we are intire strangers to; we can find no freedom with such; a kind of caution, if not suspicion, is apt to creep in, which creates an uncomfortable shyness. Thus it is with the soul of man, and his offended Creator; but this walking with him in white implies, that the distrust is removed, the sinner has fought and obtained peace with God; the sinner who was a stranger is brought near by the blood of Christ; and now freely counts all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ his Lord. He finds it is life eternal to know the only true God and Jesus Christ whom he hath sent. Although here we know but in part; yet there we shall know even as we are known. Here we see but through a glass darkly, and that with various interruptions; but there the darkness will be passed away and the true light

light shall shine; a sun shall rise which never more shall set. Here no man can see the face of God and live; but there they shall see his face, and his name shall be in their forehead; their eyes shall see the king in his beauty, and the land that is afar off. They shall find in his presence fulness of joy, and at his right hand pleasures for ever.

3. Liberty and freedom are implied in this blessed promise. It is not a walk of compulsion or constraint; no, it is our privilege to walk humbly with our God here, and much more in that happy region where sorrows and tears can never come, and where the inhabitant shall no more say, *I am sick*. Liberty is a very desirable circumstance, and we live in an age in which it is much talked of, and great exertions are made, it is said, in that respect. But alas, alas! many are sickling for liberty, whatever they mean by it, while they themselves are servants to corruption, and of course in the worst kind of bondage. But whom the Son makes free they are free indeed; for it is a blessed freedom to be free from self-will, unbelief, love to the present world, and all the perplexing cares thereof, so as to be crucified to the world, and the world crucified to us. This is liberty, to be delivered from all tormenting fears, cares and tempers. But how far such a freedom is to be expected in this life, all things considered, is a matter not so easy to determine as some persons may imagine. However, when the promise in the text is verified, all will

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be realized in the fullest sense of the word; *they enter into peace*: and their bodies *shall rest* quietly in their beds; and as to their better part, their soul being caught up in the vision of God, *each one shall walk in his uprightness*.* O happy freedom! free from all the heavy fetters of flesh and blood; from all the temptations, dangers and snares of Satan, or whatever can give pain or sorrow.

4. This promise contains a high degree of honour and respect. Indeed it is no small degree of honour which God's servants have here; for our Lord says, *If any man love me he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our abode with him*.† Such is the honour of all the saints. I have heard it said, that in the last German war, where the late Duke of Cumberland commanded the British forces, that he noticed a private man act with great bravery, and therefore gave him a commission. The man it seems was modest, as well as valiant, and would have declined the offer of his Royal Highness, and among other things alleged, that the officers would be shy of admitting him to rank with them, especially in the same regiment. The Duke ordered him immediately to be equipt in the uniform of his rank, and walked arm in arm through the lines, in the presence of all the generals and of the whole army; this was a sufficient answer to the objection made by the honest soldier; no officer of any rank would be shy with

* Isa. lvii. 2.

† John xiv. 23.

with the man so honourably treated by their General in Chief and the son of their Sovereign. Such a circumstance may be thought an honour, and so it really was; but still it was but what one poor mortal did for another, and most likely both are gone to dust; and what is it in comparison of walking with the Son of God? It is said of princes, that they shall die like the people; death makes no distinction; Alexander could not distinguish the skull of a prince from that of the most obscure person. But the Prince of Life, the Lord of Glory has overcome the powers of the grave, and will give the same power to all his faithful servants, who keep their garments undefiled. I am apprehensive there is not an action they have done to his glory, nor a circumstance in which they have suffered, but the Captain of our Salvation will bring forward to full view in all his faithful servants. I was hungry, and ye fed me; thirsty, and ye gave me drink; is the pleasing conversation that he will entertain them with, as they walk with their exalted Lord. O high honour! animating thought! O let us labour thus to enter into the joy of our Lord!

5. This promise implies eternal happiness confirmed; such are made pillars in heavenly habitations never to go out again. It is an everlasting inheritance, a building of God, an house not made with hands eternal in the heavens; a city that hath foundation, whose builder and maker is God. Therefore it is called an everlasting kingdom, a
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kingdom that cannot be shaken, an inheritance that is incorruptible, and undefiled, that fadeth not away. Could an archangel be persuaded that after millions of ages his happiness would terminate; I am inclined to think it would spread a cloud upon his celestial visage, and throw a damp over all his inconceivable joys. But the righteous shall shine as the sun in the kingdom of their Father; they shall be had in everlasting remembrance, they shall go into life eternal. What an encouragement is this to faith and patience, that they may hold out a little space longer, and all tears shall be wiped away. Let us not be weary in well doing, and in due season we shall reap if we faint not. They who sow in tears shall reap in joy. They who go weeping bear a precious seed; they shall return rejoicing, bringing their sheaves with them. Lazarus had his evil things here, but now he is eternally comforted.

“ Let those that sow in sadness wait
Till the fair harvest come;
They shall confess their sheaves are great,
And shout the blessing home.”

6. We must observe, all is of free grace, all is freely given. It was God who gave his Son to die, and freely poured his Spirit upon mankind, and who sent his blessed Gospel to be preached to us, and gave us the lively oracles. By his grace we are enlightened; seeing it was God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, to shine into our dark hearts. It was he who quickened us when dead

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in trespasses and sins, and put life into the dry bones, that *said unto us when in our blood, live.** He blotted out the hand writing that was against us, and took it out of the way and nailed it to his cross. It is he who strengthens us by his Spirit's might in the inner man, and holds up our goings in his paths, so that our footsteps slip not. It is he that sprinkles us with clean water, so that he may cleanse us from all filthiness of flesh and spirit. It is he that must quicken us by his Spirit, and at last bring us safe to glory. His blessed hands have laid the foundation, and they must rear up the building with shoutings of Grace! Grace!

All from him salvation came,

Him who reigns enthron'd on high;

Glory to the bleeding Lamb,

Let the morning stars reply.

III. How may we attain the dignity and happiness of those blessed souls? I answer, just as they did.

1. As fallen sinners they repented, were made sensible of their lost condition, and were made willing to give up every darling lust, passion and appetite. Wherever repentance is genuine that is sure to be the case. We see this in the case of Zacheus; his covetousness, and its attendant, extortion, were freely given up when Christ came to be a guest at his house. *Behold Lord, said he, half of my goods I give to the poor, and if I have taken any thing from*
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* Ezek. xvi. 6.

*any man by false accusation I restore him four fold.**

Saul ceased to persecute the church when he became a penitent. Mary Magdalen ceased her lewdness when she became a penitent. The three thousand ceased scoffing on the day of pentecost, when the cry was, *Men and brethren what shall we do?* Thus will sinners abandon their pleasing sin, their profitable sin, their creditable sin, when they become true penitents. So these excellent few, in the church of Sardis, had no doubt come in at the same strait gate. They had confessed and forsaken their sins in order that they might find mercy.

2. As sensible sinners they had fled to the bleeding Reconciler, and found redemption in his blood, the forgiveness of sin. They fled for refuge to the hope set before them. As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so is Christ lifted up; that whosoever believeth in him may not perish, but have everlasting life. *Nor is there any other name given among men whereby we can be saved, but the name of Jesus.* Therefore they renounced their own, both righteous and unrighteous deeds, and trust intirely in him who was wounded for their transgressions and bruised for their iniquities, and by his stripes they were healed. Though the doctrine of the cross is a humbling system, in abasing man; yet, it is an exceeding soul-comforting theme. By grace we are saved through faith, and that not of ourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works lest any man should

should boast. This is the way we must take, the only method whereby we can be saved. All the fine-spun systems of men will fail; for whosoever will be saved, must be saved by faith in him who came to seek and to save that which was lost.

3. These dignified souls were born again; being begotten to a lively hope through the resurrection of Jesus from the dead; they are therefore born again not of corruptible, but of incorruptible seed, which liveth and abideth for ever. This heavenly change is called a passing from death unto life; a being translated out of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of God's dear Son. He is quickened who was dead in trespasses and sins; for he hears the voice of the Son of God and lives. Thus where sin did abound grace will much more abound; and as sin hath reigned to death, grace will reign through righteousness unto life eternal. O what a change, what a revolution takes place in the new creature! Old things are passed away, and all things are become new. The understanding is enlightened, the will is subdued, the affections are raised from the dust, and placed upon things above; the conscience is purged from dead works to serve the living God. Jesus sits upon his throne making all things new. The believer is become the temple of the living God. The strong man armed is spoiled of his armour, and is driven from his habitation, so that the foul which was the synagogue of Satan, yea a cage of

of unclean birds, even the habitation of devils, is now become the temple of the living God.

4. They confessed their Saviour before men. This appears by keeping their garments undefiled. These garments were Christ's livery, the blessed uniform of the Captain of their salvation, that as he is, so they may be also. A name, a sect, a party, a system will avail very little. If any man will serve me, says our Lord, let him follow me; yea, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. Follow him in humility, meekness, gentleness, patience and long-suffering: in doing good to mankind as far as in our power lies, so that we may tread in the steps of our Great High Priest, our heavenly pattern in the regeneration: letting our light so shine before men that others seeing our good works may glorify our heavenly Father. This is the end of our calling, that we may shew forth the praises of him who hath called us out of darkness into his marvellous light. Being branches of the living vine, they bring forth the peaceable fruits of righteousness, filling up every station of life in which Providence has placed them to his honour, who died for them and is risen, and ever liveth to make intercession for them. Thus having their fruit unto holiness, the end shall be everlasting life. O happy the people, with whom it is thus in time and eternity!

5. The last trait which I shall draw of this heavenly image is, that they endured as seeing him who

is invisible. They did not grow weary in well doing. It is with many as it is with a winter's day : the sun rises with some degree of splendor, but it is soon overcast, and showers or storms and darkness soon succeed. Thus it is with many, their religion is something like the seed which falls upon stony places, where it soon springs up, but because it has not sufficient root it withers away ; or like a stream which flows from a planetary shower ; it is soon dried up again. But the religion of those noble Sardians was like the river which issues from a never-failing spring, yea, *from the river of God which is full of water.** Like the tree planted by the river of water which bringeth forth his fruit in his season ; his leaf, that is, his external profession, fadeth not, and whatsoever he doth shall prosper. Thus we must not be slothful ; but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

From hence we may observe,

1. That all merit is in our Saviour. He alone hath promised every blessing for lost sinners ; he came to seek and to save that which was lost. He that spared not his own Son, but freely gave him up for us all ; it is with him that he freely giveth us all things. Therefore worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive all honour, power, and praise for ever. He trod the wine-press alone ; no one shared in the toil with him ; he had the whole flock
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* Psalm lxxv.

of the battle to withstand, and the victory was decisive, and unto whom is the crown due but to the conqueror? He hath satisfied the justice which we had so horribly offended; redeemed us from the curse of that law which we had broken; brought life and immortality to light by the preaching of the everlasting gospel. We are redeemed at the price of his most precious blood, and are therefore his own property. He has a right to us; we are not our own, but his, and as such our all should be devoted to him. Let us herein be humble and thankful; so shall we sweetly sing,

“Crown him Lord of all.”

2. Notwithstanding all worthiness of merit is in our blessed Saviour, it is expected that a man should be found faithful. Therefore we find the excellent few in the church of Sardis so highly commended, in that they had preserved their garments undefiled. Their fidelity was pleasing to God. Another angel is exhorted to be faithful unto death, that he might receive the crown of life. The wise and faithful servant is represented as watching for his Lord's coming, and meeting with his approbation; the unfaithful servant is found eating and drinking with the drunkard. The faithful servant improved his talents, and heard the pleasing sentence, Enter into the joy of thy Lord; the slothful servant is deprived of all and cast into prison. Blessed therefore is that servant who when his Lord cometh shall be found watching!

3. We see our Lord is not unmindful of our works of faith done for his name sake. For though we are justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Jesus, yet it is necessary that we should maintain good works for many valuable ends. Nay, it is plain that we shall be judged, at the last day, according to our works. A cup of cold water given to a disciple of Christ, shall in no wise go without its reward. To his sheep he will say, I was hungry, and ye gave me meat. I was thirsty and ye gave me drink. Now they had done these things, or they would not have been noticed with such marks of approbation: But those on the left hand had omitted those things, and therefore the judge pronounces the awful sentence upon them. So here, in the church of Sardis the cold dead souls are threatened; but such as kept their garments undefiled have a glorious promise made them. Let this excite us to go forward, that we may be found of our God without spot and blameless. Thus may we be steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, in as much as we know that our labour is not in vain in the Lord!

LECTURE.

LECTURE XI.

REV. iii. 7—14.

And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia, write; These things saith he that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the key of David, he that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth: I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name. Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie: behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee. Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth. Behold I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown. Him that overcometh, will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven

heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new name. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

CONCERNING this Philadelphia we do not read any where else in the scriptures, the name is not so much as mentioned, except in the first chapter and in this place. In prephane history, we read of three cities of that name; in Egypt, Syria, Phrygia or Mesia, the last of which is the place under consideration, and is said to be twenty-seven miles from Sardis. 'Tis thought to have been a poor place; however that may be, there appear to have been some rich souls in it, and such as stood very high in the divine favour; and what is all the world in comparison of that? As they are not reprov'd for any thing amiss, either in life, doctrine, or discipline, we may suppose they kept their first love. Indeed the name is compos'd of two Greek words which signify brotherly love. Where religion prevails that prevails also; and where that decays religion is sure to decay. If we love the Saviour, by whom we are begotten to a lively hope, we love every one that is begotten of him. The more love any one has, the happier he is, yea, and the holier he is; for holiness and happiness are inseparably connected together; so that it is our privilege to be holy as he who hath call'd us is holy. The duty of the christian and his privileges go hand in hand together, these two God hath joined together, and we must

must not attempt putting them asunder. What harmony, peace and concord subsisted in the primitive church so long as the first love continued. But, alas! that did not remain long; the old murderer found the way of sowing discord, and thereby destroying this heaven born property. Therefore our daily cry should be,

“ For love I sigh, for love I pine;
This only portion Lord be mine;
Be mine this better part.”

Well, he with whom is the residue of the Spirit is able to restore that which is lost, and to number that which is wanting. I shall proceed to explain this epistle part by part, and then subjoin some general reflections.

1. We have our Lord's gracious title. *Write, these things saith he that is holy.* He is essentially holy, nothing impure could ever cleave to him; for although he was in the likeness of sinful flesh, yet he was holy, harmless and undefiled, separated from sin and sinners; the Lamb without spot or wrinkle, being the brightness of his Father's glory, and express image of his person, and in whom he was always well pleased. Had any stains been found in our great High Priest his offering would have been rejected; for he could not atone for others who was defiled himself. The whole of his life corresponded with the purity of his nature; being the good, the perfect tree, he brought forth perfect fruit, and therefore could say to his keenest enemies, *Which*
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of you can convince, or reprove me of sin? This is our comfort, that he is touched with the sympathy of our infirmities, being tempted in all points like unto us, yet without sin.

He is not only styled, *he that is holy*, but *he that is true*, not only *true*, but even the truth itself; I am the truth and the life said Jesus. He is true to all his promises. He informed his disciples that he should be crucified, and that he would rise the third day; and herein he verified his own word, and gave sufficient proof of the same, to a sufficient number of witnesses, even his confounded enemies could not gain say it to any satisfaction. He promised to send the Holy Ghost the Comforter; and in this also he proved true; that blessed Spirit was poured out, not in a corner, but at one of the grand festivals, in the most public manner; so that thousands were amazed, yea, convinced, and added to the faithful. He promised to give mouth and wisdom to his servants, when brought before magistrates, that none of their enemies should be able to gainsay. In this also he hath faithfully kept his word, as we see in the acts of the Apostles, as well as in other instances. He is the true way to the Father, the true foundation in Zion, the true bread of life, the true Messiah in opposition to all pretenders, and the true light which lighteneth every man that cometh into the world. *He hath the key of David: he openeth and no man shutteth, and he shutteth and no man openeth;* referring to *Isa. xxii. 22.* where the office of Elia-

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kim is described as the governor of the house of David, which was an office of great honour as well as power ; and here in the text it plainly shews the honour and power that rest upon the shoulder of our ever adorable Immanuel. He opens the way into the Holiest, and no man can shut it ; he opens also the sinner's heart to receive the ingrafted word with meekness ; he opens the door of utterance to his servants, to declare the words of eternal life unto mankind. He opens the way for his word to run and be glorified, from kingdom to kingdom, from city to city, from town to town, from village to village, from family to family, till the whole earth is filled with the knowledge of God. And as the key is on his shoulder, it shews that the government rests upon him ; and his shoulder is well able to bear the same, being sure as the throne of God. The prosperity, and support of the divine work rests upon the child that is born, the Son that is given ; for he is wonderful in counsel and in might, being the mighty God, the everlasting Father, and the Prince of Peace.* He has a right to prescribe laws and ordinances in his church, nor are any of them oppressive, for his yoke is easy and his burden is light. He has a right to govern the conscience, and no man or set of men have any right to interfere with him ; whenever they have attempted any thing of the kind, they have created much misery and mischief, distress and perplexity.

2. Here

* Isa. ix. 6.

2. Here is an especial favour granted to those precious souls. *I know thy works: Behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it.* It is the province of him that hath the key to open or shut the door. This promise may refer to the persecuting times: in spite of the rage of man, God our Saviour could stop their mouths, or hold their hands, so that this angel had an opportunity to exercise his ministry while the doors were shut in various other places through the violence of persecution. Men make laws and decrees against the Head of the church, yet he that sitteth in the heavens laugheth, the Lord hath them in derision. He that saith to the roaring sea, thus far shalt thou go, and no farther, can equally lay restraint upon the most raging persecutors; so that they cannot perform their enterprises. He can break the jaws of the oppressors, and pluck the spoil from their teeth. Setting before this angel an open door does not only imply his having an opportunity of exercising his ministry, but giving success to the same; for he that *hath the key of David* can open the human heart as well as a material door. And indeed if that were not the case, preaching would avail very little; but as faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God, we may hope that wherever our Lord keeps an open door, especially in the times of persecution, some hearts are open to receive the ingrafted word with meekness, which is able to save the souls of such as believe. O this is great encouragement to a faithful minister

minister of Christ, whose heart is fully and feelingly engaged in seeing the work prosper: to find his Lord goes before him, and makes his way to prosper; yea makes darkness light before him, and crooked things strait. All rocks fall down before him, and the hills melt like wax before the presence of the Lord. If rivers interpose he can dry them up; yea, if seas obstruct the path he can make a way through the watery deep, and bring his ransomed children safely through. And what can Christ's minister fear while he hears his Lord say, *Lo, I am with you alway, even to the end of the world.*

3. We have a high commendation of this angel. *For thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name. Thou hast a little strength,* and thou hast made good use of it. Perhaps the expression, *little*, was to remind him that he had nothing of his own to trust in; nothing to spare; and that if he meant to stand his ground, and do his Master's work, he must look to him every moment, and receive constant supplies from his infinite fulness. It is exceeding well for us, that the residue of the Spirit is with the Lord, and that he can, and will supply us with strength as we need it. We may be assured that he will never call us to any trials in which he will not support us; but as our day is so shall our help be. He farther adds, *and has kept my word, and hast not denied my name.* Keeping his word, is keeping the faith, as St. Paul speaks;

and there are particular seasons when our faith is put to the trial, both as to doctrine and practice; and in such seasons it is a good thing to remember what our Lord hath said, *He that keepeth my saying shall never see death. He that endureth to the end the same shall be saved. Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee the crown of life.*

It is very likely this angel had passed through some trying seasons, and stood fast, in that he had not denied the faith; had stood manfully in the cause of his blessed Master, even like the angel of the church in *Pergamos*, whose faith had been put to the trial in a persecuting season, when *Antipas*, God's faithful martyr, had been slain; and perhaps it might be the same persecution which had tried this shepherd and his flock, and whose faithfulness was so much approved of, in that he had not disgraced his high calling so much as to deny the Lord who bought him.

4. Here is a gracious promise made to him, *Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan (which say they are Jews and are not but do lie), behold I will make them come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee.* But why did those hypocrites profess to be Jews, when they were not so? To avoid persecution, to save themselves from trouble. Domitian, having raised the second general persecution against the christians, professed much friendship to the Jews, and granted them many favours, even that of their worship of God;

God; not that he loved the Jews, or their worship; but as he knew their hellish hatred of Christ, they were proper tools for him to carry on his persecution by, as such he favoured them. Now some might think to shelter themselves under the mask of the Jewish ceremonies, because they professed to worship the true God, and did not worship idols; but such prevarication, such hypocrisy did not pass with the God of sincerity and truth, who searcheth the reins and hearts. Most likely these trimmers, these time-servers might insult over the suffering followers of Christ, if not assist in persecuting them. But God saw their hearts, and was sure to call them to an account; he would make them acknowledge their iniquity, and own that the suffering followers of the Lamb were his true servants, and perhaps, solicit both their prayers and advice, and thereby own and acknowledge them to be the true heirs of eternal righteousness; if it is not done in this life it will be done in another. But the promise to these faithful confessors is extended much farther; *Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee in the hour of temptation which shall try all them that dwell upon the earth.* It is not an easy matter to tell, what this hour of temptation means, which was to try them that dwell on the earth; it was to be general, even in *all the world*. Some think it was a general persecution, and apply it to that of Trajan, which I suppose was the most general that was ever known, and spread over

all the Roman Empire. Some think it to be some destructive error which Satan, the author of deceit, would spread abroad every where, and cause a general apostacy; and this has been too awfully fulfilled. Both the Eastern and Western churches have deeply, and horridly fallen from God, and are become corrupt and abominable; yet there has been a secret remnant, which has been like a *teal tree, and as an oak, whose substance is in them, when they cast their leaves*; so these have been preserved, as a holy seed which have proved the substance.* If these epistles are emblematical, then this preserved remnant must be the Waldenses and Albigenses from whence the reformation sprung, and will issue in the glorious millennium, of which this church is a happy type, and perhaps the temptation spoken of may yet be to come, at least in part. May God prepare us for it, and for every calamity that may befall us!

5. But let the temptation be what it may, here is a most gracious promise, *I will keep thee from the hour of temptation.* This promise has been verified in many thousands of instances, as in the case of Enoch, Noah and his family in the old world, as well as the clouds of other witnesses. In the taking of Jerusalem, Josephus informs us, that eleven hundred thousand persons were destroyed: yet 'tis thought that not one christian perished among them; so graciously did the Lord hide them in the day of his indignation. That there will be a terrible cutting

* Isa. vi. 13.

ting off in the human race, previous to the glorious millennium, is what I am firmly persuaded of, and as such have ventured to deliver it as my opinion some years ago;* and it has in a small part been verified in the present horrid war, in which it is said three millions of lives have been lost, that is, as I take it, three millions of soldiers; and if so, we have reason to believe many others have died in sieges and various other calamities which the war has occasioned. But dreadful as such a destruction is, yet it is but a few drops before the shower, *the great day of his wrath*, in that respect, is yet behind; the Lord will yet come out of his place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity.† He will yet appear in the flaming fire of his righteous indignation, taking vengeance of them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.‡ In the mean time let us remember with thankfulness, that *the Lord is a refuge for the oppressed, a refuge in time of trouble.*§ *The name of the Lord is a strong tower, the righteous run therein, and are safe.*|| *The salvation of the righteous is of the Lord, and he is their strength in time of trouble.*** Thus though tribulation and anguish, distress and perplexity shall be upon the nations, men's hearts failing them for fear; yet they that trust in the Lord shall be like mount Zion, that can never be moved..

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* The Sermons on the Millennium.

† Isa. xxyi. ‡ 2 Thes. i. 8, 9. § Psa. ix. 9. || Prov. xviii. 10.

** Psa. xxxvii. 39.

moved. The eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ear is open to their prayer.

6. He gives them a needful admonition, in which a promise is included; *Behold, I come quickly.* This pointed declaration is intended as a promise to encourage them in well doing, and a blessed encouragement it certainly is; let their crosses, or trials be what they may it matters not, seeing their deliverer is at hand. Nay, whatever weaknesses, or infirmities they may labour under, their almighty helper is at hand, and will step forward in their behalf! To the same effect he speaks in Isaiah: *Fear thou not: for I am with thee: be not dismayed, I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee: yea, I will uphold thee by the right hand of my righteousness.** And again, *When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burnt: neither shall the flame kindle upon thee.†* Thus may the believer sing, God is our refuge and strength, a present help in time of trouble. But the word is a two-edged sword; and as it is brandished in the defence of the saints, so it is directed against the wicked; and here in the text it contains an awful threatening against the enemies of Christ, and against the enemies of his church. As he says elsewhere, *Behold, I come quickly, and my reward is with me, to give to every one as his work shall be.‡*

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* Isa. xli. 10.

† Chap. xliii. 2.

‡ Rev. xxii. 12.

Therefore, say ye to the righteous, that it shall be well with him—Woe unto the wicked, it shall be ill with him; for the work of his own hands shall be given him.*

7. But still, the saint must act his part, and there is a pointed call for him so to do; and hence the exhortation is, *Hold that fast thou hast, that no man take thy crown.* Hear this word, O believer, and remember, it is not given in vain. A crown is a matter of consequence. But what empty baubles are all earthly crowns? Though there is so much blood shed to obtain them, and lives lost to preserve them. They can but be held for a little time, and even during that little time they are often crowns of thorns. But here is a crown of glory, an incorruptible crown, a crown of righteousness, yes, it is a crown of life. But if thou hast a title to this crown, even faith and a good conscience, see that thou hold them fast, against every temptation of Satan, against every frown or allurements of the world; yea, and the remains of sin in a corrupt heart. Whatever persecutions may arise, whatever smiles the world may put on, remember, thou heir of glory, thy business is to stand fast in the Lord, and in the power of his might, so shalt thou be more than conqueror through him that loved thee. But this copious subject well demands a larger discussion, and for the present we shall dismiss it.

8. Here follows a promise of a very ample nature indeed.

* Isa. iii. 10, 11.

indeed. *To him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God; and he shall go out no more. A pillar implies strength and stability, and must stand as long as the building shall stand, and here, must refer to eternal glory, it being the temple or house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. No doubt but they who have suffered in the cause of Christ, and have stood manfully in the day of trial, shall have a proportionable share of glory. Hence our Lord observes, that they who have forsaken houses and lands, and wives, and children in this life for the sake of the gospel, he shall receive an hundred fold now in this time, houses and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the world to come life everlasting.** That is, they who have endured persecution, lost the favour of their friends and relations, and even worldly substance; God will make up every loss here, either in the same things, or in others which will be much more excellent; and in future they shall have an additional degree of glory; so that every loss shall be abundantly made up, and with sufficient interest too. Therefore such shall have a conspicuous rank in the church triumphant. Moreover, they shall be established so as never to be removed, not like the pillars which stood before Solomon's temple, which were broken to pieces, and carried to Babylon; no, these shall stand fast for ever; for the righteous shall be had in everlasting;

* Mark x. 29, 30.

ing remembrance. Furthermore, these shall be ornamental, or monumental pillars with honourable inscriptions written, or engraven on them; herein, he says; *I will write upon him the name of my God.* Whatever may be meant by the name of God, we may understand his image, perfect holiness, such as he will most readily own; and it may also signify, some signal honour which he will pass upon them. *The name of the city of God*, may signify their full and free liberty there, as free denizens, who have an eminent right to the heavenly Jerusalem, and be ranked among the higher order of heavenly inhabitants; perhaps may be honoured with a prior resurrection, even among such as shall rise in the millennium.* And writing his new name may signify some singular honour which he will put upon those eminently faithful souls. For as one star differeth from another in glory, so it will be in the resurrection, even among the just. That is very reasonable. For although the thief on the cross was saved, yet we cannot conceive that he will make so glorious a figure in the church triumphant as the martyr Stephen, or the Apostle Paul. Thus shall these souls be firm, glorious, and honourable in the sight of God and the Lamb, saints and angels; perhaps I may add in the sight of devils and damned souls to all eternity; for it appears from the story of the rich man and Lazarus, that the damned in hell see the saints in heaven; but that sight is so far from

* Rev. xx. 4.

from mitigating the miseries of the lost souls, that it will increase it.

9. We have as usual, the general admonition. *He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.* We must not read or hear the word of God as a general thing; but we must receive its calls, invitations, promises, reproofs, cautions, threatenings, and admonitions to ourselves in particular. We need them all in some sense or another; and therefore should make our own application. Such then as have little strength, yet keep the word of Christ's patience, and do not deny his name, may read the encouragement here given with confidence, and may apply it to the strength and comfort of their souls; so that they may be encouraged to fight the good fight of faith, and lay hold of eternal life. Indeed the way to obtain more strength or life is, to use, in a proper manner, that which we have. In this sense, to him that hath it shall be given him, and he shall have more abundance; but to him that hath not, that is, does not make use of what he has, it shall be taken from him even that which he hath.

10. How amiable is the character of this church? It stands reprov'd for nothing; on the contrary, either commendation or encouragement makes up the whole of the epistle. It is exceeding pleasing, either to speak or write to a people of this description; it being far more agreeable to a generous mind to encourage than to find fault. It is truly
pleasing

pleasing to read such inestimable characters, and they are recorded for our encouragement and imitation, so that we may be followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

10 As religion is not a cunningly devised fable, so it is not a set of tenets, or a train of ceremonies. These are too frequently substituted in the place of Christ in us the hope of glory, and all those gracious properties which constitute pure and undefiled religion, such as love, joy, peace, long-suffering, meekness, gentleness, patience, sincerity and uprightness. They who have these have crucified the flesh with its affections and lusts. This is the new man, which is wisdom from above, and is pure, peaceable, gentle, easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy. We see all this differs from the noise of a loud profession, a circumstance which sometimes happens to the dishonour of true religion, but is of vast importance in the esteem of some persons. There is no need to say much in such cases, for the tree is known by its fruit. In some instances it may be exceeding well to declare what God has done for us; as it may encourage others to hope in his mercy, and thereby lay hold on eternal life.

qu 11. How different are things in the eyes of the Almighty, and that of poor worms of the earth? Men are taken with what appears pompous and great; Jehovah looks at the man who is poor, and of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at his word.

qu 12.

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Men are usually swayed by multitudes, and take the strongest side; God looks at sincerity and truth in the inner man, and such will meet his approbation, whether it is found in a palace or a cottage; whether it is arrayed in purple and fine linen, or whether it is covered with rags. John the baptist was great in the sight of the Lord, though neither his parentage nor education, nor calling made any figure in the eyes of the world. David was a man after God's own heart, though he was but a poor shepherd at the time. Who would not seek the divine favour above all things? For his favour is better than life.

To be an heir of God, and a joint heir with Christ is the highest favour, the greatest honour that can be conferred upon a worm of the earth; though it is an honour which the world sees no beauty in, yet such is the honour which all the saints have.

12. Such as hold these churches to be emblematical believe the church of Philadelphia to be a type of the millennium, when the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of our God and his Christ for ever. A most desirable period which will take place whether this church be the emblem of it or no; and perhaps it is near at hand, though appearances do not make much for it; yet at such an hour as we think not the Son of man may come in his millennial glory. Anti-christ is falling, the false prophet is losing credit, the thrones are

are falling down, and the Ancient of Days shall set. He is now seated on Zion; he has asked, and shall receive the heathen for his inheritance, and the utmost parts of the earth for his possession. The angel shall soon fly in the firmament, having the everlasting gospel to preach, and the inhabitants of the earth shall fear God, and give glory to him. The time is swiftly approaching when the voice of a great multitude shall be heard; as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth.*

* See Revelation xix. *passim*.

LECTURE XII.

REV. iii. 11.

Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.

THE first word in the text is a note of attention, *Behold*. It is not a flourish or an expletive, but is very emphatic and significant, both here and elsewhere. Here it is intended to encourage the poor, pious Philadelphians, in their persecuted state, and under the various difficulties which they had to grapple with. In what manner could the Lord so effectually comfort them as being ready to help them in the time of trouble? There is no help like his help; if he does but step forward in our behalf all is well. But the solemn declaration, *I come quickly*, is a two-edged sword; it carries a double meaning. He comes quickly to defend his people, and to bless them with whatever they stand in need of; and he comes quickly to take vengeance on his enemies. Even when they say, *Peace and safety*, then sudden destruction cometh upon them like travail upon a woman with child, and they shall not escape. The text is therefore like the cloud which conducted the Israelites through the Red Sea, it has
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a dark side as well as a bright one ; the latter is what calls for our consideration at the present. I shall therefore, with the help of God, consider,

First, This gracious promise, *Behold, I come quickly.*

Secondly, The exhortation, *Hold that fast which thou hast.*

Thirdly, The encouraging reason, *That no man take thy crown.*

I. First then, the promise, *Behold, I come quickly.*

1. He comes quickly to pardon the poor guilty sinner ; the sinner who feels himself as such, and, like the man-slayer under the law, can find no refuge, but in the appointed city. The cry of such is, Lord rebuke me not in thine indignation, neither chasten me in thy sore displeasure. For thine arrows stick fast in me, and thine hand presseth me sore. There is no soundness in me by reason of sin. The deliverance is often proportioned to the nature of the distress such a one labours under ; if the distress is very heavy, the deliverance is quick and clear ; and there is great reason for that, lest the soul should faint before the Almighty, and the Spirit which he has made. Such was the deliverance of the thief upon the cross, as was that of the trembling jailor ; and in like manner it was the case with the trembling company on the day of Pentecost, the weeping woman who washed our Saviour's feet with her tears, and various others. Now there may be some in a similar situation here at present ; let such

step forward, and by faith touch our Lord's garment, and they shall be whole.

2. He comes quickly to enliven the souls of his people; for life is a very essential ingredient in christianity. We cannot run our christian race without it, neither can we fight the battles of the Lord; nor can we grow in grace, and in the knowledge of Christ. But then, we must remember that, no man can quicken his own soul; this power belongs to our Saviour. However, he is the resurrection and the life, and he that believeth in him, though he were dead, yet shall he live. He can speak with his own voice, and can say, Young man, I say unto thee arise; or to a dead Lazarus, Come forth, and the dead shall awake. It often happens after the first joy of the believer is abated, a calm ensues; yea, some times a dead calm, and the wheels seem arrested, at least they do not move with that rapidity which they did formerly: this must cause great heart-searchings, and the cry of the man is, *My soul cleaveth to the dust, quicken thou me according to thy word.** In that instant the Lord can speak and say, *Arise, shine, thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee.†* Yes, though the bones be dry, he can put breath into them, and they shall live. We see his power exemplified in the vegetable creation, and that continually. In winter all creation appears dead; not a leaf buds, not a flower appears, the very trees are like

* Psa. cxix. 25.

† Isa. lx. 1.

like dead flocks; but the Lord can soon say, *Lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone, and the flowers appear on the earth.** And cannot the same ever blessed Lord say, *Thy dead men shall live: together with my dead body shall they arise: awake and sing ye that dwell in dust, thy dew is as the dew of herbs.†*

3. He comes quickly to strengthen and support the fainting soul. Many are the conflicts in human life, and of ourselves we are not able to encounter them; and therefore we have need to be strengthened by his Spirit's might in the inner man; to be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might; so shall we withstand principalities and powers, and the rulers of the darkness of this world, and spiritual wickedness in high places. For although of ourselves we can do nothing, yet, through Christ strengthening us, we can do all things. Never doth Jehovah take more lofty titles than when he speaks to poor worm Jacob. He then declares, that *he hath measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, and meted out heaven with a span; and comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure, and weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance. Behold, the nations are as a drop of the bucket, and are accounted as the small dust of the balance: behold he taketh up the isles as a very little thing—All nations before him are as nothing, and they counted to him less than nothing and vanity.*

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* Song ii. 10.

† Isa. xxvi. 19.

nity.* And why does the Almighty describe himself in such sublime language? That he may strengthen the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees of his poor worm Jacob; that he may say to them of a fearful heart, *Be strong, fear not: your God will come with vengeance, yea with a recompence, he will come and save you. He giveth power to them that faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength. Even the youths, who trust in themselves, shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength: they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.*† Thus we see how his strength is made perfect in our weakness, so that the righteous may hold on his way, and he that hath clean hands may wax stronger. Now such is the help which every babe in Christ may expect. Therefore, thou poor feeble minded follower of Christ, *Fear not, thy Maker is thy husband, and thy Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel, the God of the whole earth shall he be called.*‡

4. He comes quickly to deliver, and avenge his people of their spiritual enemies. This is no new doctrine. How speedily did he appear in the behalf of Israel in the days of old? There appeared nothing but destruction at the Red Sea; and hence they cried to Moses, *Were it that there were no graves in Egypt that thou hast brought us into the wilderness.*

* Isa. xl. 12—18.

† Chap. xl. 30.

‡ Chap. liv. 5.

dernefs to die? Wherefore haft thou brought us out of Egypt? But Mofes, with full confidence in the Lord exhorts them to ftand ftill, and fee the falvation of God. *For, fays he, the Egyptians whom ye fee to-day, ye fhall fee them again no more for ever.** And fo it came to pafs; for no fooner had the Ifraelites reached the oppofite fhore, but the Lord brought fwift deftrution upon his prefumptuous enemies, and deftroyed them all.† In future ages we fee how speedy the Lord was in helping his penitent people in their diftrefs, either by human instruments, or when he faw good he did without them. When *Sifera*, the general of Jabim, King of Canaan, advanced againft Ifrael with nine hundred chariots of iron, his hoft was fuddenly routed, and he was ignominioufly put to death by the hands of a woman.‡ The Medianites again threatened them with a general deftrution, but the Lord raifed up Gedeon, and with three hundred men, only armed with lamps and pitchers, he overthrew them with a general flaughter.‡ In like manner when the Ammonites oppreffed Ifrael, how foon were they repelled and brought to nothing?§ In how ftriking a manner are thofe deliverances celebrated in the feventy-eight Pfalm? And that God does not need human instruments, or indeed any fort of instruments, is manifelt in the cafe of Sennacherib. What an army was he at the head of? And how

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* Exod. xiv. † Judges iv. 18. ‡ Judges vii.

§ Chap. x. 11.

sure did he make himself of success? How did he set God and man at defiance. *He even wrote letters to rail against the Lord God of Israel, saying, as the gods of the nations of other lands have not delivered their people out of mine hand, so shall not the God of Hezekiah deliver his people out of my hand.* However he was miserably deceived. God put his hook into his nose, and his bridle into his lips, by sending an angel, who smote an hundred and fourscore and five thousand of his army, and he returned with shame to his own land, and fell a sacrifice to his own sons, even while he was worshipping his miserable god.* Now why are all these speedy deliverances recorded? but that we may believe that his arm is not shortened, but that he can deliver as full and effectually now as ever. Most of those formidable enemies were tools, as well as types, of Satan, or perhaps of our inbred foes, which the Lord will consume by the breath of his mouth, and the brightness of his appearing. Our Saviour spake a parable that men might pray and not faint, viz. The case of a judge which neither feared God nor regarded man; and of a poor widow, who went to him for judgment upon her adversary, which he refused for a time; but at length for his own ease he fulfilled her request: And mark our Lord's fine contrast: *And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry to him day and night? though he bear long with them; I tell you, he will avenge them speedily.* Therefore be

* See 2 Chron. xxxii. and Isa. xxxvii.

be not discouraged at the remains of unbelief, the plague of an hard heart, the fragments of pride, the hellish embers of a hard heart; but remember him who said to a loathsome leper, *Be thou clean*, and immediately his leprosy was cleansed. Remember, all things are possible to him that believes. And as the lightning which shineth out of the East even to the West, so shall the coming of the Son of man be. Therefore wait thou on the Lord and he shall save thee.

5. Behold he comes quickly, to reward and punish; to reward his faithful followers, and to punish his enemies; often times in this life, as we have just observed, but more especially in the life to come. Indeed his calls by death are often very sudden, and to his faithful followers, sudden death is sudden glory; they are taken from the evil to come, they rest in peace, each one walking in his uprightness. But upon the ungodly sudden destruction cometh, yea everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and the glory of his power. But I am considering the text in the light of a promise, and especially as it refers to the angel of the church of Philadelphia, who might be in a suffering state, and is therefore encouraged in the text to expect speedy relief from his gracious Lord; and is not the Lord the same helper to all his followers who serve him faithfully? Surely he is, seeing he is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever; and what encouragement does this give to every suffering,

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ing, tried member of our gracious Saviour! He does not look on as an unconcerned spectator, but feels for his faithful followers. He will fulfil that ancient promise, *Fear not; for I have redeemed thee; I have called thee by thy name, thou art mine. When thou passest through the waters I will be with thee; and through the rivers they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burnt: neither shall the flame kindle upon thee.* Thus we see the Lord God is a sun and a shield; a sun to warm and cheer, and a shield to protect and defend, all such as fly to him. He is a very present help in every time of need.

II. 1. I come now to consider the exhortation in the text, *Hold that fast which thou hast.* Hast thou a true desire to flee from the wrath to come? Hold it fast. It is the beginning of the work of God in the soul of man. We must know our misery, more or less, before we can know the mercy of God. But great numbers stifle the work in the beginning, they strangle it as it were in the birth; the seed falls by the wayside, and it is soon either devoured or trodden down, so it yields nothing. Either conviction is too painful, and they run away from it: or there is some besetting sin which they care not willingly to give up; so they trifle about the strait gate, but do not strive to enter in. Whoever thou art, in whom the work is thus begun, do thou strive like a man in an agony; for the

the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force.

2. Hast thou faith? the faith that justifies the ungodly, that works by love? Hold it fast. If it be small as a grain of mustard seed, nevertheless it is the purchase of Christ's blood, it is the gift of God, and therefore it is precious. By faith we are justified, sanctified and saved! By faith we obtain the promises, we overcome the world, wax valiant in fight, and turn to flight the armies of the aliens. Thy faith may be often at a full stretch, so that thou hast nothing to spare; for the righteous are but *scarcely saved*; even the wise virgins have but oil sufficient for their own lamps; they have none to spare for the foolish. However, it is a mercy that it will answer the desired end in such as are in possession of it; but many are its enemies, and therefore the believer has abundant reason to watch at all times, so that he may keep his shield; so shall every fiery dart be repelled, and thy victorious soul more than conqueror through him that loved thee. O then, be thou faithful unto death, and the Captain of thy salvation will give thee a crown of life.

3. Hast thou a good conscience? Hold it fast. A good conscience is always the sure attendant on faith. Conscience is, a capacity which God gives to rational beings, to make proper reflections upon themselves; but by reason of sin this interior eye is dim, or like a concave mirror, it inverts the object; and hence it is we strain at gnats or swallow camels.

Like

Like the Jews who scrupled to enter the hall of Pilate, because he was a heathen, but made no scruple to procure false witnesses to swear away the life of Jesus; they would tythe their gardens, but made no scruple to devour widows' houses. So numbers will be very exact in some trifling ceremony; but it may be will persecute for righteousness sake. St. Paul acted from conscience when he made havock with the church of God; so did Trajan; so did Adrian; so did that poor tool of Popery, Queen Mary; but all acted from an erroneous conscience, and not by his Spirit, who came not to destroy men's lives, but to save them. A good conscience is a sprinkled conscience; it is sprinkled from dead works, and has a clear understanding of what is right; it is now a pure mirror, and can feel the slightest touch of sin; an impure thought, or a wrong temper will give it pain; it is now a watchful monitor, a faithful reprover. And the cry of its possessor is, "Give me to feel an idle thought as actual wickedness."

Now if thou hast this hold it fast; for we read of some who had this good conscience, and faith also, but they made shipwreck of them both.*

4. Hast thou hope? Hold it fast. Hope, that is a pleasing expectation, is the spring of all action. Let it be a good or a bad thing which is hoped for; it is certain that hope stimulates the mind to obtain the thing hoped for. But it is highly necessary that

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* 1 Tim. i. 19.

we have our hope well founded; that it be as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast; that it enters into that within the veil, where the forerunner is gone. There is, undoubtedly, a wrong hope, as well as a feigned faith. Hence we read of *the hope of the hypocrite, which is as the giving up the ghost*, and is as the *spider's web*.* And Job asks, *What is the hope of the hypocrite, though he hath gained, when God taketh away his soul*.† But hope is regulated by faith, if my faith is right, so is my hope; but if my faith is wrong, my hope is so of course. But the believer's hope is a *lively hope, by the resurrection of Jesus from the dead*.‡ Yea, and every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself even as he is pure. He that keeps faith and a good conscience, will certainly keep his hope stedfast unto the end, even till it shall issue in a full fruition, in a never ending possession.

5. Hast thou love? the love of God shed abroad in thy heart by the Holy Ghost, which is given unto thee? Hold fast that pearl of great price. That is the pure essence of true religion. Like a piece of virgin gold, let it be cast into what mould it may, its intrinsic value is still the same. So let the man, whose heart is filled with love, take what external form soever he may, it makes no odds; he may be a Churchman, or a Dissenter, a Lutheran, or a Calvinist; yet he finds the end of the commandment to be love out of a pure heart. This is a ray of heaven
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* Job xxvii. 8.

† Chap. xxxvii. 8.

‡ 1 Peter i. 3.

shining in a dark place. It is the religion of heaven, and carries its own evidence wherever it is. It was to kindle this fire on earth, that our Saviour came down from heaven. This is the religion which shall fill the whole earth in the great millennium, when the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of our God and his Christ for ever. God is love, and he that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God, and God in him. Knowledge is good, faith is good; a good conscience is a most excellent thing; but still love crowns all; it is the choicest fruit of paradise, the richest flower, which has a most reviving fragrance. Indeed it is a tree of life, and happy is every one that obtaineth it, and thrice happy is he that retains the heavenly guest. I may call it a ray of the Sun of Righteousness, yea a particle of Jehovah himself. O hold it fast; for it is thy life!

III. 1. I come now to consider the reason for this animating exhortation. *I will give thee*, says the Saviour, *a crown of life. A crown of life!* How charming is the sound! What a cloud does it cast over all other crowns! How does it throw them aside as useless lumber. Indeed, I believe they are often crowns of thorns, and create unspeakable trouble to the possessors, and sometimes shorten their days. But it is far otherwise with this crown of life. It is an incorruptible crown which fadeth not away. The crown which the combatants contended for in the Olympic games, were only composed

posed of leaves, or a garland of flowers, and therefore soon faded; and such as are composed of gold and precious stones, are of a perishable nature: they are often obtained by fraud and violence; but this is obtained in truth and sincerity. This being obtained, it defrauds no man of either his name, person or property. Therefore it is a crown of righteousness, and has annexed unto it a kingdom which is everlasting, and a dominion which faileth not; it is connected with an inheritance which is incorruptible and undefiled, and which is reserved in heaven for all such as hold fast their hope and confidence stedfast unto the end.

2. The jewels which adorn this crown are of the most inestimable value. *He that overcometh shall inherit all things, I will be his God.** This is a most glorious privilege, even here; and it must be much more so in a happy world of spirits. There all the glories of the Godhead must shine with inexpressible lustre; inasmuch, that in that bright effulgence they shall shine as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. I look upon that promise, *I will be their God*, to be the greatest that human language can express. All he has, I may say, is mine; yea, and all he is. All his divine attributes are engaged in my behalf, and more especially his wisdom, love and power; yea, his goodness, pity and mercy. How rich a revenue! How glorious an inheritance! *All are yours*, says the Apostle, *and ye are Christs*,

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and

*and Christ is God's.** 'Tis true, he is their God even while here, and as such he is their strength and fortitude, and by whom they overcome every obstacle; but they are here like princes in a foreign country, unknown and unconfessed; *for the world knows them not*; nor do they well know themselves; but then, when he shall make his grand appearance, *they shall be like him, and shall even see him as he is.†*

3. As he will be the overcomer's God, so in like manner such an one shall be his son. How high an honour is this! The son of an earthly sovereign is almost viewed as a superior species of being, and more especially if the prince is beloved; if he is possessed of princely qualities; how high then must that honour be to stand confessed an heir of God, and a joint heir with Christ! It is needful that we resemble our heavenly parent here below; that we put on his image, so that as we have borne the image of the earthly, we may bear the image of the heavenly.

4. The overcomer shall walk with him in white, and shall be accounted worthy. This walking with him implies liberty, for such as are in bonds cannot be said to have that freedom. God's servants are made free here, and are exhorted *to stand fast in that liberty wherewith they are made free*. But the freedom above must far excel any idea which we can have of freedom in this vale of

tears

* 1 Cor. iii. 22.

† 1 John iii. 1, 2.

tears. Here they have sorrows, pain, toil and labour. But having held out to the end, *the righteous shall enter into peace*, their bodies shall rest in their graves, as in beds of down, while their disembodied spirits *shall walk at large, each one in his uprightness*.

This walking with their Lord implies familiarity and acquaintance with him. They had some acquaintance with their God while here below, and that was life eternal; but then they did but know in part, they saw but through a glass darkly; but having finished their course with joy, they know even as they are known; for that which is perfect being come, that which is in part is done away. In the absence of the sun we are glad of the moon and stars; but, when the sun rises we see things in a different light; clear day breaks in on every side. This I apprehend will be the case with every disembodied faint. They will see the King in his beauty, and the land that is afar off.—This walking with him, implies great honour, and accordingly they have a suitable dress, they walk in white. This denotes their innocence; and moreover, they are comely through the comeliness which he puts upon them. They are even cloathed with the Sun of Righteousness, whose glories shall shine upon them with unabating lustre, world without end.*

5. The persevering faint shall be made a pillar in the house of God, and shall go out no more.†

x 3

This

* See Lecture the tenth.

† Ver. 12.

This implies firmness and stability ; to signify that their bliss is finally confirmed, and stands firmer than the pillars of heaven and earth. The pillars in Solomon's temple were shaken, yea, removed into a strange land, and were never returned ; nay, the whole temple has been demolished long since, and not one stone left upon another ; even the very foundations ploughed up ; but this temple, in which these pillars are, shall stand fast for ever, and so shall these pillars, they shall never be taken away ; but are immoveable as the throne of God ; for having his name upon them, he will challenge them for his own for ever ; and his name being upon them, gives an additional honour to them ; such as shall be to their praise ages without end.

6. Such shall be honourably confessed before the Father of our Lord Jesus, and before his angels.* The ever blessed Immanuel will own him for his, however he may have been despised among poor mortals in this world ; nay, though he may have been a vile sinner, he hath fled for refuge to the hope set before him ; he has been washed, justified and sanctified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God, so that they stand confessed the heirs of eternal life. Nor will he confess their names alone, but even their works of faith and labour of love for his name's sake, shall not be forgotten, though it be but a cup of cold water. He will say, In as much as ye did it to the least of these
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* Ver. 5r

my brethren, ye did it unto me. Glorious acknowledgment indeed! This must make their enemies cry out in distraction, and amazement, *This was he whom we had sometimes in derision, and a proverb of reproach. We fools counted his life madness, and his end to be without honour. How is he numbered among the children of God, and his lot among the saints.** O happy the people to whom it shall be thus in glory! yea, doubly blessed is that people, whose God is the Lord!

7. But the triumphant conqueror has a higher promise still, *To him that overcometh, will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne.†* This is an honour which none of the princes of this world grant unto their subjects. With all the favours which Pharaoh granted Joseph; he did not permit him to ascend the throne; *in the throne, said he, I will be greater than thou.‡* Nay, notwithstanding all the favours which Ahasuerus conferred on his minion Haman, we do not find that he once thought of associating him with himself on the throne. Now all flesh is but as grass, and even princes are formed out of dust, and may sing to corruption, Thou art my father, and to the worm, thou art my brother or sister; so that let their favours be ever so high, yet it is but a short favour from one mortal to another. But here is a promise from him who is the Ancient of Days, from ever-

lasting.

* Wisdom v. 3, 4, 5.

† Ver. 121.

‡ Gen. xli. 40.

lasting to everlasting. This sitting upon his throne is what he speaks of in Matt. xix. 28. and in Luke xxii. 30. where he tells his disciples that; *they should sit upon thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.* And I suppose what the Apostle means, when he says, *know ye not that the saints shall judge the world: yea, judge angels.** It seems as if the saints will be the jury, speaking after the manner of men, when Christ shall judge the men of the world; and, therefore, will be a kind of assessors with him in that awful scene. How amazing is all this? How far it exceeds human capacity! How true is that saying, *Them that honour me I will honour;* but mark what follows, *They that despise me shall be lightly esteemed.†* How great is the encouragement which our blessed Lord gives to all his faithful followers! O may we fight and conquer!

8. To complete the royal diadem of the conquering believer, it is said that such *shall see his face.‡* This was a favour which even Moses was denied; § for no man in the flesh can see the face of God and live. In the court of Ahasuerus it was the highest honour; for seven princes are mentioned, who were next to the king, and saw his face.¶ The light of God's countenance, or face, here means, a comfortable sense of his favour, and of our acceptance, and must be understood in a qualified sense; for we can but

* 1 Cor. vi. 2.

† 1 Sam. iii. 30.

‡ Rev. xxii. 4.

§ Exod. xxxiii. 20.

¶ Esther i. 14.

but see through a glass darkly; but every interposing veil being removed, we shall see him as he is. Yes, thou struggling soul, struggle on, and thine eyes shall see the King in his beauty; they shall behold the land that is now afar off. How delightful must be the sight! What was Solomon in all his glory in comparison of the beatific sight, the sight of a precious Christ in glory!

The flame of angelic love

Is kindled at Jesus's face;

And all the enjoyment above,

Consists in the rapturous gaze."

Ah, what would the place of heaven be without the presence of the Saviour? Nothing; desolation, a naked void. But the fulness of the Godhead bodily manifested in the person of our adorable Immanuel, is a matter, or subject, of the most glorious nature. The glory of God and the Lamb, will be subjects of eternal praise, and objects of divine adoration world without end. Therefore well may the Apostle say, *Beloved, now are we the sons of God; but it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.**

* 1 John iii. 3.

LECTURE XIII.

REV. iii. 14—22.

And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans, write ; These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God : I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot : I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth : Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing ; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked. I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich ; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear ; and anoint thine eyes with eye-salve, that thou mayest see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten : be zealous therefore and repent. Behold, I stand at the door, and knock : If any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me. To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and

*and am set down with my Father in his throne.
He that hath an ear let him hear what the Spirit
saith unto the churches.*

LAODICEA was a city in Lydia, by the river Lycus, about forty-two miles from Philadelphia. We find mention made of this church in Col. iv. 16. *And when this epistle is read among you, cause that it be read also in the church of the Laodiceans; and that ye read likewise the epistle from Laodicea.* From hence some infer, that St. Paul wrote an epistle to the Laodiceans. Indeed there is an epistle extant in Greek, which I have in my possession, said to be that which St. Paul wrote, but it is looked upon as a forgery; it resembles that to the Philippians in style and matter, and is judged to be an imitation of it by some unknown hand. It is thought by some, that Archippus was the angel, or pastor, of the church of Laodicea, at the time of St. John's writing, and St. Paul's message to him gives some ground for such a conjuncture. *Say ye to Archippus, Take heed to the ministry, which thou hast received of the Lord, that thou fulfil it.* The admonition implies, that there was some danger of remissness in Archippus; and the angel in this epistle is charged with lukewarmness; so that the coincidence of the circumstances, lays a probable foundation for the conjecture, that Archippus was the lukewarm angel of the church of the Laodiceans.

The

The complexion of the angel, or minister, is generally that of the church.* A dull minister, and a dull people generally agree together. We may judge that this church was once in a flourishing state, but was now much fallen from her steadfastness. She was grown self-sufficient, and wise in her own conceit to a very high degree, as is the case in general with such as grow lukewarm. The soul which is lifted up is not upright; such seldom find access to God, while he looks at the man that is poor and of a contrite spirit. He filleth the hungry with good things, while the rich are sent empty away. Even the greater our gifts are, and the greater danger we are in of falling into condemnation: so we have need to cry out each for himself, Keep me, keep me gracious Lord, and never let me go.

I shall now endeavour to expound this epistle part by part, and add a few circumstances in the way of improvement.

I. 1. We have our blessed Saviour's title, the *Amen*. This is a pure Hebrew word, and usually closes the petitions to the throne of grace, in most languages. In Hebrew it means firmness, and stability; and as such it must be understood in this place. This church was unstable as water, and did not excel; but Christ, the immoveable foundation, stands firmer than the pillars of heaven and earth. He is Alpha and Omega, the first and the last; the
same

* See page 12.

same in counsel and might, and his years fail not. His wisdom and love are the same, his power is the same; and the ransom which he hath paid for our souls is the same in efficacy and power as ever it was. His promises are all the same, yesterday, to-day, and for ever. The word which we render *verily*, in the New Testament, is in Greek *Amen*, and when used in the beginning of a sentence, is an adverb, and marks out a strong asseveration; and in the gospel of John it is generally repeated, as *Verily, verily, I say unto you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and they that hear shall live.* When it is used at the end of a sentence it notes our strong assent, wish or desire, as in several verses in the 27th chapter of Deuteronomy, and at the close of the Lord's prayer, in which we put our seal of confirmation to what has gone before. In the text it is closely connected with what follows, *the faithful and true witness.* Faithful to all his gracious purposes and designs; to all his blessed promises and declarations. Nor can he be unmindful of his threatenings; for even these must be fulfilled on all incorrigible offenders. His testimony is true concerning himself, and his ever blessed Father; also concerning the way to eternal life. He witnessed to all with the strong testimony of his own blood. It may be proper here to observe, that the word, rendered witness, is in Greek the same as martyr,

such as witness to what they are persuaded is true, at the expence of their lives. The words here may be rendered, the martyr, the faithful and true,* all which he may emphatically be said to be. *The beginning of the creation of God.* Called in another place the first-born of every creature.† This is spoken of his human nature, the pre-existent state of our Saviour's human soul, and of which he speaks when he says, *I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him who sent me.* And again, *Glorify thou me with the glory which I had with thee before the foundation of the world.*‡ Agreeable to which the apostle says, *Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet, for our sake he became poor.*§ It would be highly improper to quote these texts to prove his divinity; but they prove what the text asserts, namely, that he is the beginning of the creation of God, the brightness of his Father's glory, and express image of his person.¶ But we can scarce make sense of these passages, if we disallow the pre-existence of his human soul as distinct from his divine nature. Therefore, he was before all created things in this sense, and in him centered all the souls which have been, or are, or shall be. As one seed has all the future seeds which shall spring from it contained in itself. So I apprehend all the souls of mankind were centered in the soul of Jesus.

I know

* ο μαρτυρ ο πιστος και αληθινος.

† Col. i. 15. ‡ John xvii. 3. § 2 Cor. viii. 9. ¶ Heb. i. 3.

I know the word,* rendered *beginning*, signifies the head, or prime, or most excellent, and in that sense is eminently true with respect to Christ, who is supreme, the head of all principality and power. But in this place it undoubtedly means priority, including the other also.

2. We have, in the next place, a heavy charge brought against them: *I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then, because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth.* From hence it seems, that a poor unawakened sinner, yea, even a profligate, is in a more hopeful way than a dull, lukewarm professor. Hence he says, *I would thou wert either cold or hot.* That is, it would be better, and thy state more hopeful, if thou made no pretences at all to religion, and had never known the ways of God, than thus to become like the snuff of a dying taper. But it is far better to be like the fire on the altar, always burning, always ready to consume the sacrifice; for "Devotion, when lukewarm, is undevout." To sink down into a lukewarm state, argues the most supine indolence, and the basest ingratitude, and must be highly offensive to the Almighty.

We see, even in the Old Testament, how displeasing to God indolent, lukewarm professors were. *Curse ye Meraz: said the angel of the Lord, curse ye bitterly the inhabitants thereof: and why? be-*

cause of their supine indolence: *for they came not to the help of the Lord, to the help of the Lord against the mighty.** A woe, a dreadful woe is pronounced against such as are at ease in Zion.† When the Almighty comes to search his Jerusalem, his church, with candles, he will then punish the men who are settled upon their lees.‡ Solomon is every where severe upon the sluggard, and frequently rehearses his doom; and we find it is a part of the condemnatory sentence, thou wicked and slothful servant; thy order was to occupy till I came; but thou hast neglected thy talent. Every thing in the divine life requires exertion; for the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent ones take it by force. Hence we are called to fight the good fight of faith; to run with patience the race set before us; to give diligence to make our calling and election sure.

3. Notwithstanding this dead fly in the ointment, we see the self-sufficiency of these poor cold Laodiceans; the good opinion which they had of themselves. *Thou sayest I am rich and increased in goods, and have need of nothing.* Very likely they might be in a state of ease and worldly affluence. For although persecution made many poor enough, yet as it did not affect all alike; some could temporize, and save themselves; and in some places the Roman governors were more favorable, and did not enforce the penal laws, as might be the case

* Judges v. 23. † Amos vi. 1. ‡ Zeph. i. 12.

case in Laodicea; on these or other accounts they might flourish in worldly circumstances, which does not always prove favourable to religion.

But their riches and confidence might be in another respect; they might fancy their spiritual state to be much better than it really was: for a state of lukewarmness is very apt to deceive people, by making them think themselves to be something when they are nothing. They might fancy themselves to be wise, orthodox, regular, reputable saints. It is intirely human to think well of ourselves, and our partial, short-sighted fellow mortals, by judging according to outward appearance, may think the same. But, remember, the things which are highly esteemed in the eyes of men, are an abomination in the sight of God. But as this subject demands a much larger discussion than time will permit at the present, it shall lie over till we meet again.

4. But though, these self-confident souls had formed so good an opinion of themselves, their real state was very different; they knew not that they were wretched, without God and without hope in the world; exposed to the attacks of the enemy: like the *vineyard that was all grown over with briars, thorns and nettles, and the stone-wall thereof broken down.** Or, like the *infant, cast out into the open field*, quite forlorn and helpless.† Pitiful is that case when the person is destitute of all good, and yet fancies all is well. Like the insanian, who
fancies

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* Pro. xxiv. 30—34.

† Ezek. xvi. 2—6.

fancies himself a king, and such as are gazing at him his attendants, and knows not that he is a poor madman in a cell, chained to the wall, and lying upon straw.

Not only wretched, but *miserable* also. *Miserable* with bad tempers, evil desires; hurried away with such passions and appetites, as will not fail to torment them. Conscience can bear them no very welcome tidings; for although it is biased, and like a bribed witness, does not speak the truth, yet it falters, and will not stand the test of a strict examination. As it is said of the stones in the high-priest's breast-plate, when the answer was unfavourable; they became dim, and their lustre changed. Not only wretched and miserable, but also *poor*, so that they could not help themselves, were quite insolvent; and like the woman who had spent all her substance, but was no better, but rather worse. Poor indeed, having little or no faith; no love, patience, or heavenly mindedness; all like an old ruin, in which there may be some vestiges of its original grandeur, yet is so broken and shattered, as plainly to declare that the master is gone; and nothing left, but dreary and defiled apartments, filled with damp vapours, rubbish, vermin and creeping things. But the piece is not finished; all the outlines are not filled up: they were *blind*; did not even know their own disease. Blindness here means gross ignorance, a most mortifying circumstance to such as are wise in their own conceit, and who plume themselves of their

their superior wisdom. Nothing will mortify, what is commonly called, a gentleman so much as to hint that his upper chamber is empty. It appeared this was the case with the jewish teachers. Are we blind? said the Doctors. And finding nothing else to object to the man that was born blind, they exclaim against him: *Thou wert altogether born in sin; and dost thou teach us!* It is hard to convince those who think themselves wiser than their teachers. — But we have not done yet, *thou art naked*, saith the Spirit of truth: Naked of the fine linen of the saints; naked of the image of God. Not justified, not sanctified; like the man who had not on the wedding garment; and when the King comes to see the guests, when he comes to judge the world in righteousness, such must have their portion with their own fraternity, with hypocrites and unbelievers. O, what need have we to be jealous over ourselves with godly jealousy! lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety, our minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.

5. But attend to the divine admonition. *I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire.* That is, faith working by love. If we are endued with this, we are rich no doubt: for by faith the Lord becomes our God, and if he be our God, all is ours. We can never be poor so long as we are the children of God. All the promises are ours; and they are great in number, and precious in their nature. If we have
faith,

faith, we have every grace of the Spirit; for faith is like a queen, who always is attended with a proper train. Such is true faith; it is always attended with love, joy, peace, patience, long-suffering, and every thing that is truly excellent.

But this faith must be tried in the fire of affliction, more or less; and therefore will be found more excellent than any worldly thing, how valuable soever it may be. It is sometimes tried by Jehovah himself. Thus he tried the faith of Abraham, Jacob, Moses, and all his saints; and it was found sterling, to the honour and praise of God and the Lamb. Sometimes God permits Satan to try the faith of his servants, as he did Job, Joshua, the High Priest, the Apostle Paul, and various others. Oftentimes the men of the world are permitted to heat this furnace, to try and purify their faith; yea, he may permit men to ride over our heads, but all is for some good purpose, that we may be found to the praise of the Lord who bought us. They were *naked*; and he only had suitable raiment, and therefore counsels them to buy of him white raiment. The righteousness of the saints, the righteousness which is by faith, which covers our naked souls from the rigour of justice, from the curses of the holy law, from the wrath of a righteous God. As they were blind, he exhorts them to buy of him *eye salve*; that is, divine illumination, by which we see ourselves poor and needy; the world vain and empty; Satan cruel and crafty; but above all, by this light we see Christ altogether lovely;

lovely, the fairest among ten thousand. But how few, even among such as profess religion, are there who keep the eye-salve, and make constant use of it! Hence it is, that after many years profession, they appear to have made small advances in any thing belonging to the divine life. Their judgments are as dark, and their will as unbroken as ever; their passions as strong, and their affections cleave as much to the dust as ever: so that we can but see exceeding few who are growing in grace, and in the knowledge of Jesus. This is truly lamentable; but it is a sorrowful and sad truth. What envy, whispering, tale-bearing, and evil-furmisings, do we discover among such as call themselves the disciples of Jesus Christ!

6. But after all, he is not willing to reject them: he urges his general method,—*As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten.* He still expresses his love to them; and though he rebukes in very plain language, and often chastens by wholesome afflictions, yet it is all in mercy; and exhorts his children not to *despise the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when rebuked by him.* Faithful indeed are the rebukes of the Friend of Sinners; they are for our good, that we may shake off lukewarmness, and a holy zeal animate our better part. *Be zealous,* says he, *and repent*; let thy mind be changed, have different views of thyself, thy state and condition; and let godly sorrow take place, that thou hast fallen into that state of stupidity and self-sufficiency, so
contrary

contrary to my will, and thy real advantage. Let every lukewarm professor who hears me this day, lay these things deeply to heart, for unto such is this word of exhortation sent.

7. After all, we see his kind condescension and long tried patience. *Behold*, take great notice of what I am going to say, *I stand at the door and knock*. Mark, he was not in the house; he had been disgusted with their lukewarmness and had left the house, or they had thrust him out of his possession; and therefore he stands at the door, and knocks like a stranger. O, how desolate is that church, that soul, which has not the presence of God in it. Heavy were the tidings to Moses, when Jehovah denied his presence to accompany them in their journey. *If thy presence*, said he, *go not with us, carry us not hence.** The Israelites, though flushed with victory, made a miserable stand against the people of Ai, when they were deprived of the presence of the Lord; their hearts became weak like water, and even Joshua falls on his face in great amazement; but there was an accursed thing in Israel, nor would he be any more among them till the accursed thing was taken away.† And at another time, when they would presume to go against their enemies without the divine presence, Moses said, *Go not up, for the Lord is not among you, that ye be not smitten of your enemies.‡* However, go up they would, and it happened as Moses told them: they were

* Exod. xxxiii. 5. † Joshua vii. 12. ‡ Num. xiv. 12.

were smitten before their enemies. And thus it will happen to all who are wilful and disobedient. But the divine presence does not always suddenly depart : we see it gradually withdrew from Israel : first it withdrew from the temple to the threshold of the door,* and then it hovered over the threshold for some time, and then it departed into the midst of the city, and from thence to the mountain on the East side of the city,† and from thence was its final departure ; and thus the Israelites remain without God and without hope, till the glory of the latter days, when the glorious presence shall return again.‡ Desolate indeed is that church, and miserable is that soul, from whom the divine presence is departed. Like a world without a sun, so is the soul without God.

“ Not all the harps above

Can make a heav’nly place,

If God his residence remove,

Or but conceal his face.”

If the unclean spirit return and find the house empty, he will venture in again ; but if he see Jesus on his throne, he will give back. He knows his ancient conqueror, and trembles at his name.

If any man hear my voice, I will come in and sup with him, and be with him. How gracious ! how condescending ! Coming in and supping implies the nearest intimacy, the closest connexion that can possibly be conceived ; and therefore a complete

* Ezek. ix. 3.

† Chap. x. 4.

‡ Chap. xxviii. 24—29.

plete reconciliation takes place, and the breach finally closes.

8. We have the promise to the final overcomer, namely, to *sit upon his throne*. A high honour indeed ! An honour which the princes of this world do not confer. High were the honours which Pharaoh conferred upon Joseph, but the throne was an exception : *Only in the throne I will be greater than thou*. When Ahasuerus referred the manner in which his favourite should be honoured, to Haman, who judged himself to be that favourite, we may suppose it set his head to work, and he schemed the royal horse, robes, and crown ; but he did not dare to mention the throne. But Jesus promises a share in his throne. Perhaps it is the same thing which St. Paul refers to, where he says, *Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world ? Know ye not that ye shall judge angels ?** So likewise our Lord : *Verily I say unto you, that ye which have followed me in the regeneration, when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.*† I do not apprehend that this honour will be to all the saints, but such as have been eminent, fought hard battles in the cause of truth, and gained glorious victories, through the blood of the Lamb ; who have overcome as their Saviour overcame, and who will therefore be more than conquerors through him that loved them. For multitudes of such as will be saved will

* 1 Cor. vi. 2, 3.

† Matt. xix. 28.

will be infants; and we cannot suppose these will be assessors with Christ in judging the world: these will need and receive further instruction; which may fall to the lot of some of the adult saints to teach them. Some again will be saved as by fire; yea, whose flesh will be given to destruction, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord. We can scarcely think that these will sit on thrones with Christ when he will judge the world. We read that some of the saints will be kings; of course they must have subjects; and who can be their subjects but such as were much less eminent in the kingdom of Christ's cross. We may easily suppose there will be subordination, even in heaven; but it will be perfectly easy, and the parties subject will be completely happy: their station, capacity, and disposition will all harmonize; so that as one star differeth from another, it will be with the saints in glory. But all will be peace, all will be harmony and concord; no envy or jealousy; no lordly over-bearing; but all, like the different wheels in a large machine, acting in concert, subject to one *primum mobile*; or, like the different members in our body subject to one head; or the different strings in an instrument, all in perfect unison, producing harmony and melody under one skilful hand; and the whole ascribing salvation and honour to him that sitteth on the throne and to the Lamb for ever.

9. The general admonition is, *He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the Churches.* Let him hear what the Spirit saith to all

these Seven Asian Churches; and in them what he saith to all the churches in every age and country: for these letters are not of any private interpretation. They are for the edifying of Christ's body, till he shall appear in the clouds to judge the world; and in these epistles a word is found to all professing Christians, in every age, sect, and country. But here let every one particularly attend to what is said to these *Laodiceans*. What a mixture of awful reproof and sweet encouragement! how happily are they blended together! A notable example for ministers, both in dealing closely and yet tenderly. It is needful for the hearers to receive reproof with kindness and good will, so that the well-timed rebukes may not fall to the ground, or cause resentment instead of reformation. We rarely, if ever, in scripture find the children of God resenting reproof; it is not the spot of God's children.

10. From the tenor of this epistle, we see that luke-warmness is the worst state we can be in: Christ Jesus himself being the Judge; *I would thou wert either cold or hot.* A poor ignorant sinner has nothing to trust in; if he would kindle sparks and warm himself he cannot; his flint is too dull and his tinder too wet and damp, he can raise no flame; more especially if he comes under the word; his armour is taken from him in which he trusted; and he falls down and submits to the force of truth. But a luke-warm professor knows every thing, and yet knows nothing as he ought to know. It is no bad remark that some have made of Felix, and his wife Drusilla: while

while Paul was reasoning of righteousness, temperance, and Judgment to come, Felix trembled; but we do not read that Drusilla trembled: he was a poor ignorant pagan, and most probably, never heard the like before, and therefore it awfully impressed his mind; but Drusilla was a Jewess, and, very likely, had heard the judgments of God denounced, or had frequently read them in the law and the prophets; but they had lost their influence upon her. Such is the case of lukewarm souls under the most lively means. Though the word is a fire on every side, yet he knows it not; *yea, though it burns him he lays it not to heart.**

11. Such as hold these epistles to be emblematical look upon the church of *Laodicea* to represent the eve of time, when Satan shall be released from his prison, and shall deceive the nations again, and raise his final rebellion against God and the Lamb, and thereby bring a general defection into the church of God. How melancholy a consideration, and how unaccountable! Mysterious indeed is the oeconomy of Providence! That after so glorious a period, as that of the Millennium, there should come so general an apostacy.† But, just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints! We believe Infinite Wisdom cannot err, and Infinite Goodness will do nothing wrong. What we discover in the Divine proceedings is all just and right: and we may safely infer what we cannot see is full as much so. However, we may bring the matter to this conclusion: Let him that thinketh he stands take heed lest he fall. z 2 LEC-

* Isa. xlii. 45. † See Sermon II. on the Millennium.

LECTURE XIV.

REV. iii. 17.

Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing: and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich: and white raiment that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear: and anoint thine eyes with eye-salve that thou mayest see.

AMONG the many evils which attend leaving our first love, that of growing wise in our own eyes and prudent in our own sight is not the least. It is a very easy matter to grow wise in our own conceit. The Corinthians had fallen into this condemnation; the Galatians were in great danger, and so were the Colossians; and therefore were strongly guarded against the evil. Indeed when that is the case, when men are above being taught, and think themselves to be something, there is little hope of doing them good; the disease is too far gone, and nothing but the immediate hand of God will avail. To all such the apostle speaks thus: *If any man think himself*
wise,

wife, let him become a fool, that he may learn to be wise. Into this condemnation these poor Laodiceans were fallen; they plumed themselves of their imaginary excellence: *Thou sayest, I am rich and increased in goods, and have need of nothing, &c.* The state of this church is so common, and yet so dangerous, that though I have been pretty copious in expounding the epistle, yet I deem it highly necessary to give this part a larger discussion; and therefore it will be necessary to consider,

I. The good opinion they had of themselves.

II. The judgment of God concerning them.

III. The counsel which he gives them.

I. 1. The good opinion they had of themselves: *Thou sayest, I am rich and increased with goods, and have need of nothing.* The words may imply that they were persons of opulence and wealth; which is very apt to puff up the vain mind. But I shall rather consider the matter in a spiritual sense.

They were favoured with great and special privileges; perhaps the rod of persecution did not fall as heavy on them as on some other churches, and therefore might enjoy all their privileges in an ample manner. It is a blessing, an unspeakable blessing, to have the privilege of worshipping God in the way which we believe to be according to his word, and to have the gospel preached in its purity; but still we must remember, where much is given much will be required; and therefore so far should we be from growing high-minded; we should fear lest a promise

being left us of entering into his rest, any of us should seem to come short of it. Remember the case of Chorazin and Bethsaida, cities lifted up to heaven in privileges; yet so great was their condemnation, that even Sodom and Gomorrah were in a more desirable state. O, may it never be our condemnation, *that light is come into the world, and that we should love darkness rather than light.* And what cause of humility and thankfulness to us that we are in the enjoyment of what prophets and kings desired to see and hear, and had not that favour conferred upon them.

2. Sometimes this self-confidence arises from speculative knowledge. Knowledge is certainly good if it be properly used, especially the knowledge of ourselves, the emptiness of the world, of Satan's devices; and, above all, the knowledge of the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom he hath sent. Of these things we cannot know too much; but there is a knowledge which puffeth up and maketh men vain and supercilious. This tree of vain knowledge is what many are seeking after, and debarring themselves of the Tree of Life. This kind of wisdom is carnal, earthly; oftentimes sensual and devilish. Indeed it is not much knowledge which does puff up the mind; a smattering of knowledge is mighty apt to do this; for it is in this case as I have read of a student in philosophy: In his first year he thought he knew every thing; in his second he was not quite so confident; but in his third year he saw that he knew

knew but very little. I wish all who receive the gospel to be intelligent, so that their understanding may be to the soul what the eyes are to the body. However eager a blind man may be to run, he may make greater haste than good speed; because he may run against the first post, or fall into the first ditch, which may obstruct his way. Labour, therefore, after useful knowledge; but let it not be like the light of the moon; though it gives us light, yet gives no cheering warmth: but let it be like the mid-day sun; which not only gives light, but a vivifying heat; and whose rays create fruitfulness wherever they shine. This wisdom cometh from above; and is pure and peaceable, easy to be intreated; full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy.*

3. Some have an high opinion of themselves because they have been a long time professors; measuring their state by the number of years in which they have been called by the name of Christ. But length of days does not always teach men wisdom, nor is a grey head the proof of a sound heart. The Hebrews appear to have been a considerable time in the school of profession, but not much to their credit; the apostle himself being a witness. In treating of the priestly office of our blessed Lord he says, *Of whom we have many things to say, and hard to be uttered, seeing ye are dull of hearing. For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you*

* James iii. 17.

*you again what be the first principles of the graces of God.** This passage is so far from praising these people for the length of time which they had professed religion; that it carries an air of severe reproof; and the apostle herein tries to rouse them out of their dulness: *That ye be not slothful, says he, but followers of them who through faith and patience have inherited the promises.†* An old, dull, self-sufficient professor is likely to be no small hurt in the church of God. His example may have considerable influence over others, or it is a stumbling-block in the way. So that such have no cause to plume themselves of their long standing; but rather humble themselves in dust and ashes on account of their unfaithfulness; lest, like the barren fig-tree, they be cut down as cumberers of the ground.

4. Some are not a little elated with the regularity of their outward conduct, not considering they may be as whited walls or painted sepulchres; as salt that hath lost its savour. Outward regularity is highly becoming the gospel, and may be called the leaves of a living tree. But let it be remembered, though there cannot be fruit without leaves, yet there may be leaves without fruit. A man who once did enjoy the life of religion; and loses that life and sinks into a Pharisee: I may say, there is more hope of a fool than of such an one. He is in danger of forgetting that he was once purged from his sins. I am free to confess that many have spoken great swelling words of

* Heb. v. 11, 12, 13. † Chap. vi. 12.

of vanity in making very high professions, while their conversation has differed very widely from their profession. But observe, there are deceivers of another stamp; the Antinomian and the Pharisee will both fare alike, as they walk in the sparks of their own kindling; this they will have at God's hands: They shall lie down in sorrow.

15. The favour and respect which some lukewarm professors meet with has no small influence in puffing up the vain fleshly mind; forgetting that the things which are highly esteemed among men are often an abomination in the sight of God. It has sometimes surprised me not a little to see, how some have had the address to work themselves into the good graces of their short-sighted fellow-mortals, who have been much deceived in them; yea, some of the worst of the human race have carried on that solemn farce till their deeds have been made manifest. Some that could carry on their hypocritical mummery to an extraordinary length have almost been canonized abroad, yet have been like fiends or furies at home, making every one miserable they have any intercourse with; and others could be perpetrating the foulest crimes, and yet keep on the mask of religion; living in uncleanness, or in the most cunning methods of fraud and guile. It is true, the Lord knows those that are his; nor can any thing be concealed from the eyes of him, before whom all things are naked and without a covering. Herein I would say, Be not deceived; for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall

shall he also reap. He is the Christian who is one inwardly; and true Christianity is that of the heart; in the spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not of man, but of God.

6. But let the ostensible causes of this self-exaltation be what they may, the true cause is ignorance; ignorant of themselves, and ignorant of Satan's devices; and therefore not knowing that they are posting to everlasting ruin with a lie in their right hand. For though they profess themselves wise, they are in reality fools; and their folly will one day be made manifest. Here one might breathe out the wish of Moses: *O that they were wise: that they understood this! that they would consider their latter end.** For God will bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil.†

II. I come now to consider the judgment of God upon these poor lukewarm souls. We have just heard, that ignorance was the fundamental cause of their sad disease; and so it really was, the Lord himself being the judge: *Thou knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.* This is an hideous picture, sure enough; and although I have pointed at it before, I think it necessary to take a full view of it now.

1. *Thou art wretched.* Whoever thou art, if thou hast not the love of God in thine heart, who hast not Christ in thee, the hope of glory; thou hast

* Deut. xxxii. 29.

† Eccl. xii. 14.

no fellowship with the Father and with the Son ; thou hast no sure title to heaven ; all is darkness and uncertainty. There is no faith purifying the heart ; no hope to be the anchor of the soul ; alas ! she is tossed with every wind, unstable in the waves, and in danger of dashing upon every rock, or being swallowed in the vortex of every whirlpool, which may obstruct our passage through life. O, it is night, a dark tempestuous night ; not the star of a promise appears ; and perhaps, thou, like Jonah, art gone down unto the sides of the ship, and art fast asleep in thy carnal security, although thou art just upon the breakers which must undo thee for ever. Ah, what meanest thou, O sleeper ? Arise, and call upon thy God, if so be God will think upon thee, so that thou perish not ; yea, I say, Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light. Hear thou the voice of the Son of God, and thou shalt live.

2. Such are not only wretched, but they are miserable. And how should they be otherwise ? While a soul is destitute of God, it must be the habitation of devils, a cage of unclean birds ; full of wrong desires, or wrong tempers ; and what a tempest do these raise in the soul of man ! What will large possessions, or the honour of men avail in such a case ? What will purple and fine linen avail the man that is a leper ? What will a luxurious table avail the man that is all wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores ? Thou art not only an aching void, but a stormy chaos,

chaos, and thy poor soul a nest of scorpions, of stinging, tormenting vipers. Anger, peevishness, fretfulness, and discontent, are thy daily plagues; and surely thou dost not need anything else to make thee miserable. It is an observation that has often been made, *viz.* that the tempers of a man fallen from grace are worse than they were before he pretended to religion; and I think it is too true; yea, our Lord confirms it. When the unclean spirit goeth out of a man, he goeth up and down seeking rest, but he finds it not: then saith he, I will return to my house from whence I came; and he finds it empty, swept, and garnished: then he taketh seven spirits worse than himself, and entereth and abideth there, *and the last state of that man is worse than the first.* But still he knows not that he is miserable; that is, he knows not that God is departed from him; and, like Sampson, who was the sport of his enemies, and unable to help himself.

3. *Thou art poor.* This is another feature in this frightful portrait. But it was not a worldly poverty, for I rather think in that respect they were wealthy; but their poverty was of a spiritual nature. They had little or no love, and of course little pure zeal; for true zeal for the honour of God is the flame of love. If love be wanting, what is our religion good for? "He does much," says Kempis, "who loves much; and what he does is for the glory of God." Yes, this love, this man of love, suffereth long and is kind; yet he vaunteth not himself,

self, is not provoked, thinketh no evil; beareth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Great and glorious is this account indeed, and much to be desired. Love containeth every good thing; not only whatever is active in religion, but what is passive likewise; which is implied in bearing, hoping, and enduring all things. Love therefore implies meekness, gentleness, patience and resignation: and the man is poor indeed who has not these, as was the case with this lukewarm angel; and if *Archippus*, as some suppose, was the angel, well might the Apostle give it in charge to say unto Archippus, *Take heed to the ministry which thou hast received of the Lord, that thou fulfil it.*

4. But this is not all. *Thou art blind*, saith he, whose eyes are as a flaming fire. This must be a mortifying reproof. Scarce any thing is so galling to a man who is wise in his own conceit, as to object to his understanding; it touches him in a tender spot, and he feels it most sensibly. *Are we blind?* said the self-confident Pharisees. No, they could not think so; and therefore their sin and ignorance remained. But is not this the state of many poor backsliders? It is true, they retain the form of sound words; but then they are mere dead images. Such resemble the skins of animals which are stuffed, which, at first sight, and at some distance, seem as if they were alive; but, at our nearer approach, we find both the life and body are gone. Alas, my brother, thou art fallen among thieves, and

they have stripped thee, and wounded thee; yea, they have put out thine eyes. Thou hast not that feeling sight and sense which thou once hadst. Thy spirit is not so watchful, thy conscience is not so tender; thou hast lost that loving, reverential frame of mind which once possessed thy happy soul; it is not with thee as in months past, when the candle of the Lord shone upon thy head.

5. To complete this wretched character, he adds, *Thou art naked*. One can scarce imagine a more pitiable situation, or a more uncouth picture, when taken altogether:—*Misery, wretchedness, poverty, blindness, nakedness!* What a group of disagreeable properties are here combined together! Thou art naked of the fine linen, the righteousness which justifies the ungodly; as such, art exposed to the wrath of God, the arrows of infinite justice, the tremendous curses of his holy law; the right-aiming thunderbolts of the Almighty are pointed at thee, and thou art naked, and exposed to them all.

But the case of such an one is still more deplorable. It is not only destitute of justification, but of sanctification also. Like the Israelites who had stripped themselves to make the golden calf, and were naked to their shame; even so it is with the poor lukewarm professor. His locks are shorn, his strength is gone, and he is become weak like another man. Pitiable is thy case, thou poor fallen soul! How is thy gold become dim, and thy fine gold changed! How is the crown fallen from thine head!

head ! Woe unto thee, that thou hast sinned ! How mournful was the sight of the king of Babylon, when deposed from his throne, and obliged to take up his dwelling with the beasts of the field ! His stately palace exchanged for the open field ; wet with the dew of heaven, exposed to storms and tempests ! The company of his noble lords and generals exchanged for that of brutes, and his luxurious table for the herb of the field ! Or see the poor prodigal, brought up in scarlet, and now embracing a dunghill ; once feeding delicately, now attempting to satisfy his hunger with the food of swine ! These are the lively images of thy state, thou poor renegado, who hast wandered from thy good and gracious God.

Well, but after all, is there no remedy ? Yes, all thanks be to God, there is : and this leads me to the third general head.

III. 1. *I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich.* By gold, is generally understood faith working by love, and is called precious faith ; yea, more precious than gold that is tried in the fire. Gold is the most precious of all metals ; and the term *tried*, implies it to be pure and sterling, free from dross or base alloy. Such is pure gospel faith. It works by love, it purifies the heart, and nothing is able to overcome it.

This faith, for very wise reasons, is sometimes tried by the Lord himself, as we see in the case of Abraham, Jacob, Moses, David ; yea, in all the prophets and apostles, and almost every Christian

that we read of. It is tried by men, when God permits them to ride over our heads, to vex and harraß us by various means which are put into their hands ; and wherein they have not failed to exert all the force which they were capable of, either by cruelty and oppression, or by many allurements in which they have lain in wait to deceive. The faith of God's elect has been tried by Satan ; but it has repelled his fiery darts, and quenched them in the blood of Jesus. Through this all-prevailing faith, the ancient worthies *subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong ; waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens.** Thus powerful it was in acting. And how did it behave in suffering ? He tells us. *They had trials of cruel mockings and scourgings ; yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword ; they wandered about in sheep-skins and goat-skins, being destitute, distressed, tormented.†* Thus faith is gold tried in the fire, and is found to the praise and glory of God.

2. By *gold tried*, we may understand all holy and heavenly tempers ; that patient, loving, humble, thankful, and sincere mind, which was in Christ Jesus. O, what are all outward forms or modes, without these godlike properties ! These constitute the

* Heb. xi. 33, 34. † v. 36, 37.

he Christian; they mark out the heirs of glory, and will stand, will exist, when sun, and moon, and stars, shall fail; when heaven and earth shall pass away; even when faith is lost in sight, and hope in a blessed fruition; yet love, and all connected with it, must stand immoveable as the throne of God, even to the countless ages of eternity. Being endowed with these heavenly riches, we can never be poor: we shall be opulent, and need not to take up with creature-comforts, seeing we have in us the well of salvation, springing up to eternal life.

3. As they were naked, they were exhorted to *buy white raiment, that they might be clothed, that their shame and nakedness might not appear.* The man in the gospel wanted this heavenly covering, and therefore was cast into outward darkness. The raiment in this place, must refer to a clear sense of justification through the blood and righteousness of our great High Priest. It is this which covers the shame and guilt of all our sin. That is the true meaning of the word atonement, or propitiation for our sins; so that the believer may sing, *Blessed is the man whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sin is covered, and in whose spirit is no guile.* Well might the prophet exclaim, *I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garment of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decked with ornaments, and as a bride adorned with jewels.* Charming language!

May God apply it to our consciences every moment! Thus may we, like *the king's daughter*, be *all glorious within*, and our clothing be of wrought gold! May we come into the presence of the King of glory in this *white raiment* of heavenly needle-work; not having our own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of the Son of God, even the righteousness which is of God by faith.*

4. As they were blind, they were counselled to *anoint their eyes with eye-salve*, that they might see. The proper *eye-salve* for blind souls is, the illumination of the divine spirit. These people were wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight; yet, alas, that only deceived them! They viewed themselves through a wrong medium. But this heavenly anointing enables us to see things as they are, and make a proper estimation of ourselves, and thereby not to think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think; but to think soberly. By this heavenly illumination we see how vain and empty the world is, and will never have any dependence on it. Its flattering smiles we are justly jealous of, and its frowns do not intimidate us; for we know it cannot hurt our real interest: It is the same heavenly light which unfolds the scriptures to us; for they will never be well understood but by the same spirit which dictated them. We see this verified in the Jews of old with regard unto the Messiah.

They

* Psalm lxx. 12, 14. Phil. iii. 9.

They expected a Messiah ; and the prophets, especially Isaiah, marked him out in very clear and express characters. He came under those very features in which he had been described,—*a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief*: but they knew him not, nor the scriptures which had so clearly described him to them. Nay, the disciples who had left all for Christ, yet were ignorant of the nature of his kingdom, and consequently of the scriptures which testified of him. He opened their eyes after his resurrection, that they might understand the scriptures. But still they remained but in a gloomy state, till the divine Teacher instructed them at the day of Pentecost. But even then, Peter appears to have spoken some words which he really was ignorant of at the time he spake them. In addressing the Jews, he says, *The promise is to you, and your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call*. And yet, when he was called to go to the house of Cornelius, he objected, because he was a Gentile. And do we not see many, even teachers in our Israel, who manifestly do not understand the scriptures? Let any one who understands those sacred oracles, hear the modern sermons in the general, and read the numerous comments which are obtruded upon the public, and they may easily be convinced of the truth of what I am delivering. Nay, *what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of a man that is in him? So the things of God can no man know but by the Spirit of God*.

5. We see the unwearied patience of the sinner's Friend ; for to these dull souls he adds, *As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten.* His corrections are out of love ; and he has a right to know by trial what our patience and resignation may be. These passive parts of religion are of the greatest importance, and shew more of the Christian than all the high professions we can make. These graces can never be made manifest but by trial, therefore let patience have its perfect work, and resignation so complete as to say, *thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.*

6. But that they might awake out of their lethargy, he says, *Be zealous, and repent.* When love is wanting, there can be but little zeal : for zeal, true Christian zeal, is the pure flame of love. There may be something that is noisy and troublesome, which would call down fire from heaven ; which breathes threatening and slaughter, desolation and destruction. Such was the zeal of Saul, and the greatest part of persecutors. Such zeal is like a volcano, that belches out fire, smoke, and ashes, and carries destruction and desolation wherever it comes. But that zeal which is the pure flame of love, is like the mid-day sun, which scatters the darkness, and makes fruitful wherever it arrives. They are exhorted to repent of that dull lukewarmness which they were sunk into. True repentance is manifested in confessing and forsaking every abomination, however it may be secreted from the eyes of mortals. It is a *godly sorrow which works repentance*

penitance unto salvation, not to be repented of. And if it be genuine, it will work in the party, *carefulness* to please God, *a clearing of themselves* in the fight of men; *yea, indignation* against the things that are wrong; *yea, great fear* of offending the divine Majesty; *a vehement desire* to regain the first love, and holy zeal in the cause of truth; and a pure *revenge*, even upon themselves and their inbred foes; being willing in all things to *approve themselves* in the fight of God and man.* Such are the properties of that true zeal which attends awaking from that dull stupefaction which is called, lukewarmness.

7. What need is there to know our genuine state! to examine ourselves whether we be in the faith; to be jealous of ourselves with a godly jealousy,—lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety, our minds should be corrupted from the simplicity which is in Christ Jesus.

8. But what a blessing it is that that there is a remedy! *Behold*, says the God of love, *I stand at the door and knock.* Amazing! Must he stand in the attitude of a servant, and knock like a stranger at his own door? How amazing is this! What! was he turned out of his own house? What violence was this? But hear, hear the language of this condescending Saviour of sinners: *If any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.* Here is encouragement

* 2 Cor. vii. 10, 11:

encouragement to the vilest of the human race! Nay, he awakes his ungrateful, sleepy spouse, with the most kind and effecting language;—*Open to me my sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled: for my head is filled with dew, and my locks with the drops of the night.* Say, ye affectionate and faithful matrons, could ye hear such entreaties from a kind and tender husband? Would it not shake the slumber from your eyes; yea, and from your hearts too? O, now make the application! Call upon the name of the Lord, he is near to save; he is strong to deliver; yea, to deliver thee from lukewarmness, from dull insensibility,—as bad a state as a sinner can be in out of hell. Does he not tell thee in plain terms, that he waits to be gracious? Does he not stand waiting as a servant? Does he not stand to knock at his own door as a stranger? Consider this, ye that forget God, lest he leave you; yea, swear in his wrath ye shall not enter into his rest; yea, lest he tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver!

LECTURE XV.

REV. iii. 20.

Behold, I stand at the door and knock: if any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to him, and sup with him, and he with me.

HOW true is that declaration of our Lord! Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out. This blessed declaration is and has been fulfilled in many thousand instances among all sorts and conditions of mankind. It has been fulfilled in such as had not known the Friend of sinners; as in Mary Magdalen, Zacheus, the thief on the cross, a persecuting, murdering Saul, the trembling jailor, with multitudes which no man can number, who will be found washed in the blood of the Lamb. Or if they be such as have revolted from the Lord of life and glory, and like the prodigal have wandered from their Father's house; all thanks be to God, they may be received into favour and fellowship again. This is manifest in this epistle. He reproves this angel, and in him, as I conceive, the whole church, for self-sufficiency and lukewarmness; which, I apprehend, generally go together. He faithfully reproves them in very plain and striking terms; and affectionately exhorts them
to

to amendment; and although he had withdrawn, ye he had not finally rejected them; he stands in a waiting posture, and did not finally quit them, but solicits an entrance again. All this he does to us; and unto us is this word of admonition sent. It is ushered in with a note of attention, *Behold*, a word that is never used in scripture as a mere flourish; there is always something very significant follows, as has been observed before in the course of these Lectures.

I shall through divine aid consider,

I. The adorable person who knocks.

II. What is implied in so doing.

III. The bars which keep him out.

IV. The blessings which will accrue to such as will admit him.

I. I am to consider the adorable person who stands and knocks at the human heart.

1. It is he that made us and all the world; God over all, blessed for ever; the fountain of all life, light, power, and goodness; who spake, and it was done; who commanded, and it stood fast; who rules in the armies of heaven above, and performs his own good pleasure here on earth; whose omnipotent hand none can stay, or say, What doest thou? It is he which sitteth on the circle of the earth, and before whom the inhabitants are as worms and grasshoppers; yea, as the small dust of the balance, as a drop of the bucket. How astonishing is this, that the Almighty should stoop so low as to beg his poor indigent dust and ashes to accept of him as their guest!

guest! We might rather cry out with the royal ador-
 er, *Lord, what is man, that thou art mindful of*
him, or the son of man, that thou shouldst visit
*him?** Or as Solomon said: *But will God in very*
deed dwell with man? Behold, the heaven of hea-
vens cannot contain thee!† Much less the scanty
 hearts of the children of men. O what love! What
 goodness! What pity and compassion do we see in
 the redemption of a lost world!

2. Therefore, we must consider him in the capa-
 city of our blessed Redeemer: This brings him near
 to us; the divine perfections are veiled in the man
 Christ Jesus. No mortal can approach an absolute
 Deity; even angels veil their faces before him; and
 the spirits of just men made perfect cast their crowns
 at his feet. But we see the glory of God in the
 face of Jesus; and may rejoice with joy unspeakable
 and full of glory. He is the brightness of his Fa-
 ther's glory, and the express image of his person.
 The rays of the Godhead are so qualified in the hu-
 manity of Christ, that we can behold them with
 some degree of comfort and satisfaction; because they
 all sweetly harmonize in him who was wounded for
 our transgressions, and bruised for our iniqui-
 ties, and by whose stripes we are healed. In his
 meritorious passion justice is demonstrated and satis-
 fied; the law is magnified and made honourable.
 He is the blessed day's-man who lays his reconciling
 hands upon both parties. God is in Christ, reconciling

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* Psa. viii. 4.

† 2 Chron. vi. 18.

ciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses to them; and by whom is committed to us the word of reconciliation. He hath made peace by the blood of his cross, to reconcile all things to himself; whether they be things in earth or things in heaven. Redemption may well be termed "The labour of the skies."

"He hath ransom'd our race;
O how shall we praise?
Or worthily sing his unspeakable grace!

3. View him as our all-gracious provider, and almighty preserver; and here he still comes nearer to us. What ample provision has he made for his great family! Indeed he hath filled his large house with abundance of all things pertaining to life and godliness. What a vast variety! to suit every creature with food and cloathing. He hath made the earth, the sea, fountains, and all their streams subservient to the use of man; not only these, but all their produce; almost an endless variety, all made for our convenience: So that he giveth us all things richly to enjoy. Let us remember that, all our temporal mercies come swimming in the red channel of his most precious blood. The Father spared not his own Son, but freely gave him up for us all; and with him he freely gives us all things. And he who hath taken such care to provide for the body, does not forget the better part. He who hath taken such care of the casket will undoubtedly regard the jewel which it contains. Is it guilty? Behold, he hath provided

provided a pardon, "A pardon bought with blood," even *the blood of the cross*! Is the soul vile and filthy? There is a fountain open for sin and uncleanness, in which every stain may be purged away, so that the king's daughter may be all-glorious within. Is the soul weak and feeble? He hath made provision for that also; for as the salvation of the righteous is of the Lord, so he is their strength in the time of trouble. Is the soul surrounded with enemies? No doubt but she is; yet the Lord is her shield, her buckler, and refuge; yea, a strong hold in the day of trouble; yea, a wall of fire round about them that trust in him. And even when he permits crosses, troubles, trials, and difficulties to assail his feeble followers, still he causeth all things to work together for good; so that he makes all things in heaven, in earth, yea, even in hell, to work in their behalf.

4. But how low did he stoop? He was in the form of God, and thought it not robbery to be equal with God; yet made himself of no reputation; but took upon him the form of a servant; and being found in fashion as a man, he became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Our reason might think that if God would assume human nature, it must be in the most honourable state, exempt from pain, poverty, and reproach; yea, from temptation, persecution, and death: But was that the case? Far, very far from it. His poverty was such, that when the tribute was demanded he had no money, but wrought a miracle in order that it might be procured.

Nor did he claim any property in either house or land; so that though the foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, yet he had not where to lay his head. Is reproach a species of persecution? Who had a heavier load of it than Jesus of Nazareth? Reputed a sabbath-breaker, a wine-bibber, that is, properly, a drunkard; a blasphemer, one that acted in conjunction with the devil; yea, that had a devil; and I make no doubt but thousands believed all that was said was true; so that he might with great propriety say, *The reproaches of them that reproached fell upon me.* Yet he did not complain; he did not cry, nor strive, nor cause his voice to be heard in the streets. Even in that critical and awful process which he went through from the garden, the scene of his bloody agony, to his expiring groans upon the cross, he was as a lamb led to the slaughter, and as a sheep dumb before her shearers he opened not his mouth. He freely laid down his life; he loved the church and gave himself for it, that he might wash it with water by the word. He made his soul an offering for sin, that he might see of the travail of his soul, and be satisfied. O love immense! O pity inconceivable! the Judge dies for the criminal! the Innocent dies for the guilty! Life issues from death; ease from pain; and honour rises out of ignominy. O, hearts of stone! relent! relent! Look upon him you have pierced, and mourn. Such is the adorable person who stands knocking at thy rebellious heart, who solicits thy reception of him. Art thou not ready to cry out,

Come

Come in! come in! thou heav'nly Guest!

Nor hence again remove;

But sup with me, and let the feast

Be everlasting love.

II. But what is implied in our ever adorable Lord thus standing, and knocking at the human heart?

1. It implies amazing love. It was love which brought him from his Father's bosom down to the stable and manger at Bethlehem. It was love which caused him to be tempted in the wilderness: that he might succour the tempted, he was tempted in all points like unto us, and yet without sin. He can feel for the tempted,—he can feel for them experimentally, and succour them effectually. It was love that actuated his righteous soul in all his painful labours, and in all the reproach which he submitted to during the time of his ministry. Great were his labours, and ungrateful were the returns which he received; yet we find no murmurs, no complaints come from his sacred lips. Sometimes, it is true, he gave his opposers needful reproofs, which brought upon him all the weight of their fierce indignation; and sometimes he put them to profound silence, by his pertinent and pointed expostulations; but still, when he was reviled he reviled not again; and when he suffered he threatened not. It was love that carried him through that strange process of amazing and complicated scene of sufferings; in the garden, the stage of his bloody agony, from thence to the High Priest's hall, and thence to Pilate's bar; where the

glorious Sufferer underwent such a scene of insults and cruel mockings, as we scarce read of any where else ; yet those waters, high as the billows roared, could not quench the flame of his love. See the awful procession pass through the crowded streets of Jerusalem, where the object is, Jesus carrying his cross, till, spent with long watching, fasting, and loss of blood, he faints under the enormous load ;—the body faints, but love faileth not. His very prayer, most likely while they were driving the rugged iron spikes through the shivering flesh, was, *Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.* Even that bitterest cry of all,—*My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me ?* was yet the cry of love. All creation sympathizes with the Divine Sufferer, by signs from heaven ;—the heavens put on mourning ; the sun veils his glories :—by prodigies on earth ; the rocks rent ; the graves open ; the faints arise ; and the vail of the temple, the emblem of Christ's humanity, is rent from the top to the bottom. Here we see love is stronger than death, seeing it overcomes death itself. Nor did it reside, or remain in the grave ; for when he ascended up on high, and led captivity captive, love distributed gifts to men, even to the rebellious, that God might dwell among them.

2. This knocking implies amazing condescension. Will an offended prince stand knocking at a rebel's door ? More especially to request reconciliation ? Nay, such acts of humble goodness are not found
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among the princes of this world. But such is the humility of Jesus. He who thought it no robbery to be equal with God, yet took upon him the form of a servant : and in that humble form he now waits upon thee, O sinner ! Art thou not ashamed to keep the Lord of glory waiting, whilst thou art indulging his enemies within ? He calls upon thee emphatically, Behold, take notice of my kindness ; look at my humble deportment, and be ashamed of thy pride and obstinacy. Indeed, it is matter of astonishment, that he whom all the heavenly inhabitants adore, yea, whom the heaven of heavens cannot contain, yet should be waiting for admission among worms of the earth.

3. This knocking implies great compassion in the sinner's Friend. In his love and in his pity he redeemed us ; and the same love and pity are still extended to the poor fallen race of mankind. It is one trait in the character of our High Priest, that he *can have compassion on the ignorant, and such as are out of the way*. This amiable quality he maintains in all the dispensations of his Providence towards his poor helpless worms. How feelingly is this displayed in that fine allegory, of the poor helpless infant cast out into the open field ? Ezek. xvi. 3—10. And again, in the story of the good Samaritan ! This godlike property is a glorious adorning of human nature, wherever it is found ; even amongst poor, frail mortals, encompassed with infirmities of a sinful kind ; like a diamond set in clay ; but in him it shines

shines in full lustre, like a most precious stone in burnished gold. In the days of his flesh, the wretched of every description crowded about him, and he had compassion on them, and healed such as had need of healing. And is he not the compassionate Jesus still? May not every poor sensible sinner cry out,

“ Art thou not touch'd with human woe?
Hath pity left the Son of man?
Dost thou not all my sorrows know,
And claim a share in all my pain?”

He does know; and he feels too: he is the Head, and feels for every member; and as such, this humble posture of knocking waits to be gracious.

4. This kind procedure implies great patience with perverse, ungrateful mortals. This divine perfection has been manifested in instances innumerable. He waited patiently for the old world an hundred and twenty years, after he had given them a solemn warning. He waited patiently for the repentance of Sodom and Gomorrah, and for the inhabitants of Canaan; and would not suffer even Abraham, his friend, to have a foot of their land till their iniquity was filled up. We see the same patience manifested towards the Israelites, till they became as bad as the Canaanites, whom he had driven out before them. They were often warned; and whenever the warning had a good effect, he forbore, withheld his just indignation, and granted them a longer space; granted repeated mercies, and gracious chastisements; did all that was necessary for his vineyard, before he entirely

entirely laid it waste : before he cut down the fig-tree, he digged about it with various corrections, reproofs, calls, and admonitions ; he cast in the tillage of helps, promises, and gracious invitations ; so that it might yield fruit. Thus we see how he bore with this lukewarm Laodicean church ; and to bring the matter nearer, how has he borne with us ? O that his patience and long forbearance may lead us all to true repentance !

5. Abundance of grace and mercy are made manifest in this heavenly attendant, thus meekly waiting to do his poor sinful creatures good. Grace is as significant a word as any we have in our language : Its most general meaning is, divine help ; such as we stand in need of. By this grace we are convinced, strengthened, enlightened, comforted, purified, and preserved ; and if ever we enter the shining gates of the New Jerusalem, it must be by grace. Therefore we are wholly and entirely, from first to last, saved by grace. And does not the darling attribute of mercy, that removes our misery ; I say, does not that appear as conspicuous as the rest in this humble waiting upon poor sinners ? It is ; and it is perfectly consistent with justice, because justice is perfectly satisfied by the sacrifice upon the cross. O, let this gracious, this benign perfection of the Deity, have its heavenly influence over each of us ; that it may be fully glorified in our present comfort and happiness, and in our everlasting felicity !

6. This

6. This divine conduct implies the use of various means, for which he is never at a loss.

He knocks by the hammer of his pure word; and wonderfully efficacious has it been: many a hard heart has been subdued thereby. *Is not my word, says Jehovah, like a fire, and like a hammer which breaketh the rocks in pieces? The word of God is quick and powerful, sharper than a two-edged sword, piercing, dividing asunder soul and spirit, joints and marrow: and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart.* This has often been the case in reading as well as hearing the lively oracles of God. Christian assemblies and christian conversation are of great use in knocking at human hearts, and have often been made successful therein; and it would be well if they were more attended to. Nor must we overlook many instances of a kind Providence, which, by wholesome afflictions, in pain or sickness, or various losses and disappointments, have been made happily instrumental in opening human hearts. Nor must we overlook even dreams and visions, in deep sleep, when God has spoken to man, and opened his ear to receive instruction. The Bible abounds with various instances of this sort; and I hope I am not preaching to a congregation who deny or reject the oracles of God. Oft times, indeed, God makes use of very simple means, that the excellency of the power thereof may redound to him unto whom it belongs; and that no flesh may glory in his presence. The blowing of rams' horns can make the
high

high walls of Jericho fall, if God put his blast in them. A sling and a stone, even from the hand of a stripling, can bring down a blustering Goliath, when God gives the direction and energy to the contemptible missile. Thus does God chuse the weak things of the world to confound the strong; and foolish things to confound the wise. But, if he please, he can act without any visible means. How far angels may be instrumental in the salvation of sinners no one can say. That they rejoice at the conversion of sinners is certain; and we are assured that they are all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister to such as shall be heirs of salvation. From the tenth chapter of Daniel it appears, there are conflicts between good and bad angels, but they are invisible to us; and as evil angels are daily seeking to destroy the work of God in the soul of man, why may not good angels seek to promote it? As one are seeking and promoting the destruction of men's souls, why may not the other seek and be successful in their salvation? I don't apprehend that the Almighty needs the ministration of angels any more than that of men; but he is pleased to make use of it; and no doubt it is their honour, and they esteem it as such; and it is a comfort to the saints that are attended by such glorious guards by night and day. *For the angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them.* But the Almighty hath no need of men or angels to carry on his work, either of nature or grace, He whose Spirit

Spirit moved upon the face of the deep, can move upon the hearts of the children of men ; and even does so without any external means whatsoever ; so that the Heathen, who have not the letter of the gospel, are not deprived of this divine and internal teacher. Indeed it is this heavenly agent which must give energy to all instruments, or they will labour in vain. Even Paul may plant, and Apollos may water ; but still, it is God who giveth the increase.

Before I close this head, permit me to ask my hearers, whether they are attentive to the calls of this heavenly Stranger : for a Stranger he must be, seeing he stands at the door and knocks. What sort of company is there within ? Have the pleasures of this life taken possession, and are they making such noise and uproar, that your poor soul does not hear the voice of this heavenly charmer ? Perhaps it is with thee as it was with the Epicureans of old. *The Lord God of hosts called to weeping and to mourning, and to baldness, and to girding with sackcloth : And behold, joy and gladness, slaying of oxen and killing of sheep, eating flesh, and drinking wine : let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die.** Ah ! pitiful is thy case : thou art like Solomon's fool, sleeping on the top of a mast, and the boiling lake beneath thee. Remember, time is wasting away, and this divine attendant will not always be insulted ;—he will not always strive with
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* Isa. xxii. 12, 13.

perverse rebels. Consider, what end wast thou made for? and whether thy present state is likely to answer that end? How are you deceiving yourselves! It is with you according to that prophetic description; *Even as a hungry man dreameth, and behold, he eateth; but he awaketh, and his soul is empty: or, as a thirsty man dreameth, and behold, he drinketh; but he awaketh, and behold he is faint.** Such are all the scenes of worldly happiness: they are only so many waking dreams, which amuse fools, kill precious time, rob God of his glory, and men of their salvation.

Are you cleaving to the dust? Are you the busy drudge who rise early and take rest late? The Epicurean has the advantage of you. He now and then has a pleasing dream; whereas you starve in the midst of plenty. Hurry, distraction, and anxiety, are your constant companions. Dark brooding cares furrow your brow; and, like Cain, your countenance is ever fallen, and you make your own life thorny and rough. Alas! my friend, your building is not like Solomon's temple. When that was building, the noise of axes and hammers was not to be heard there; but the clatter of these things are so great in thy poor soul, that the voice of the heavenly charmer cannot be heard. But if thy soul do not resemble the temple when building, it is the true image of it when it was defiled with the oxen and the sheep, the money-changers, and the seats of them who sold

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doves;

* Isa. xxix 8.

doves;* and it seems, if the Lord will come, he must bring his scourge with him, and drive those traffickers, all those intruding cares, from his habitation; so that he may not permit his house to be a den of thieves. He cannot, he will not associate with company of that sort: for what communion hath Christ with Belial? Or what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? Therefore, hearken to this heavenly visitant; remember who he is, and what he hath done and suffered for you. He still waits to be gracious; he hates putting away. What did he say to backsliding Israel of old? *How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? How shall I deliver thee, O Israel? How shall I make thee as Admah? How shall I set thee as Zeboim? Mine heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together.* And he gives a very good reason for his divine and merciful conduct: *For I am God, and not man; the Holy one in the midst of thee.*

* John ii. 15.

LECTURE

LECTURE XVI.

REV. iii. 20.

Behold, I stand at the door and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and sup with him, and he with me.

THE two first points have been considered; and therefore I may, without ceremony, attend to the third; which is, to consider the bars which keep the Lord of glory from his habitation.

1. There is stupid ignorance. This was the state of these Laodiceans. *Thou sayest, I am rich and increased in goods, and have need of nothing:* So they thought; but what was their real state? They were *wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.* But all this they were ignorant of. The same complaint was brought against the Pharisees. They demanded in a haughty tone, *Are we blind also?* We, who are doctors of the law, and teachers of the people? Do not we know our duty as well as thou canst inform us? *If ye were blind,* said our Lord, *ye should have no sin:* that is, if your blindness were of that kind for which there is no remedy, and you were sensible of it, there

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could

could be no blame in you ; but, being self-confident, ye say, *We see*, and therefore despise the remedy, *your sin remaineth*.^{*} Ignorance, amongst the Papists, is the mother of devotion ; but that is not the doctrine of the Bible. If we saw and felt our real condition, we could not remain without God and hope in the world. They that be whole need not a physician, but they that be sick. Such as know they are sinners will seek this remedy ; they will seek the Lord while he may be found ; they will call upon him while he is near. But, so long as a dullness, a numbness of spirit abides, they will be contented to live without God and without hope in the world. They know not that they are dead, and therefore do not seek for a quickening ; they know not that they are naked, and do not seek for divine clothing ; they know not that they are guilty, and do not seek for that pardon which is necessary for salvation ; they know not that they are polluted, and need washing in the blood of the Lamb. Now there is a remedy ; but, alas ! many reject it, and therefore may be said to be wilfully ignorant ; and, as such, they themselves are to blame. For this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, but men love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil.

2. Unbelief is another grand objection to his coming to his temple. The Bible is so pointed and express against this curse of mankind, that we might look

^{*} John ix. 40, 41.

look upon it as Pandora's box, containing all the evils which have befallen mankind from the beginning to the present hour. It banished man out of Paradise ; it brought a curse upon Cain ; it brought destruction upon the old world ; it overwhelmed Sodom and Gomorrah ; it prostrated the many thousands of the Israelites in the wilderness, and prevented their entrance into Canaan ;* it held the hands of the Son of God ; so that *he did not many mighty works*, in his own country, *because of their unbelief*. This destroyer of mankind is a greater conqueror than Alexander the Great ; for there is no nation under the heavens where its devastations are not found. Men of all nations, and of all creeds, are brought into its subjection : the Pagan, the Jew, and the Infidel, are all in unbelief. Yea, the Papist and the Protestant, the Churchman and the Dissenter, the Calvinist and the Arminian, are equally involved in this general condemnation. God hath concluded them all in unbelief, that he might have mercy upon all. By faith we receive Christ ; by unbelief we reject him. By faith we receive promises ; by unbelief we reject them. By faith we are justified ; by unbelief we are condemned. By faith we overcome the world ; the cares, snares, frowns, or smiles, the spirit and fashion of the world : by unbelief we are brought in subjection to the whole. True faith, like a queen, goes attended with a proper train of graces ; but unbelief, like the great harlot of Babylon,

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makes

* Heb. iii. 19.

makes all nations drink of the wine of her abominations. Here then, thou poor Laodicean, is a grand obstruction to this heavenly Guest coming into thy soul. Be thou feelingly sensible of the same.

3. Pride and self-will, stand centinels to keep the door against the Lord of glory. The language of pride is, *I will be like the Most High*: and it is the same satanical temper which has filled the world with all the misery and mischief which has happened from the beginning of the creation to the present moment. Many persons have got very erroneous notions of pride; they lay the whole stress on outward trifles; such as dress, language; yea, sometimes decency and decorum have been stigmatized with the reproachful terms of pride and high-mindedness. I own, when much care is taken to deck and trim a poor dying carcase, more perhaps than circumstances or good sense will admit, it shews a degree of vanity which is far from being commendable; but pride goes much farther than that. Pride entered into the heart of man long before the fashion of apparel was found out; nor do I see any humility in slovenliness, or in being a clown. The source of pride is self-will. It was self-will which turned angels into devils, and which turned Adam out of Paradise. It moves in all orders and degrees of mankind; down from the stately palace to the peasant's hut. We see it operate full as much in the lower walks of life as in the highest circles. I may appeal to all our manufacturing towns for proof of this. What amazing trouble

trouble do tradesmen find in their servants and workmen at certain seasons! How much time will they spend in drinking and caballing against their masters and employers, to their very great injury, and also to the ruin and impoverishing of their own families. What envy and evil surmising do we see in such as are poor! And what supercilious haughtiness and contempt do we see in such as Providence has raised from the dunghill! But in this sense we may say, as Solomon says in another, *The poor and the rich meet together*. Excellent is that prayer which our Saviour hath taught us: Among other important petitions there is this; *Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven*. What is it which makes heaven so very desirable? Because the will of God is continually done without the least deviation. And what is it which makes the idea of hell intolerable? The cause is self-will. If that cursed self-will should cease, I apprehend the flames of hell would soon die away. From whence arise all the wars and fightings which are in the world, which ruin kingdoms, and set the nations in a flame? They spring from self-will. And why is it that thousands continue dead in sin, wretched and miserable? Our Lord shews the reason: *Ye WILL not come to me, that ye might have life*. What sayest thou, attentive reader? Art thou not crying out,

“ Oh, hide this self from me, that I
No more, but Christ in me, may live!
My vile affections crucify,
Nor let one darling lust survive.

In all things nothing may I see,
Nothing desire or seek but thee."

4. Another stubborn hindrance in the way of Christ is, love to the present world. This Achan in the camp has often made Israel turn his back in the day of battle. It is indeed the root of all evil; and has pierced thousands through with many sorrows, and drowned their minds in perdition and destruction. And I know none in greater danger of this gloomy idol than the lukewarm professor. There are many evils in the world to which we may suppose he is dead: he can find no satisfaction in them; they are to him as children's toys, mere trifles; but the world holds out something that appears substantial, and yet is a deception; it is only a mist, which appears solid at a distance, but upon the touch it is only air. *He that seeketh silver shall never be satisfied with silver.** And yet, it is amazing how many ways this human tormentor has of pleading its own cause. It comes entrenched behind innumerable pretences; as frugality, necessary care, providing things honest in the sight of all men. All this is very good; but what is it brought in for? To countenance this general idolatry; foolish idolatry, and an idol which the Devil despises. For among the horrid crimes which Satan is charged with, we never read of his being charged with loving of money; so that a money-lover is guilty of that which neither beast nor devil is ever charged with; for

* Ezck. v. 10.

for the brutes are regardless of worldly pelf as the Devil himself is. No wonder then this cursed evil should keep the Lord of glory from his habitation. Christ and Mammon can never reside together in the same dwelling. Therefore, *if any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.*

5. There is a carnal mind which is enmity with God; and where it prevails is sure to exclude the Lord of glory his possession. The term *enmity* is a strong expression, it is much stronger than that of *enemy*; for our enemy may be reconciled; but enmity cannot, it is a fixed hatred; a rooted antipathy, and therefore must be destroyed. It is the *old man*, and must be crucified; not laid under an arrest only, but brought forth and executed. This carnal mind is in every unregenerate soul; it reigns there, but when grace takes place there is an opposition; it is with the soul as it was with Rebecca when the children struggled within her. Here the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh, and these are contrary one to the other. And while any spark of that enmity abides, it is sure to militate against the Lord of glory; it is a true antichrist, and will fight the true anointed of the Lord. Why do we feel a backwardness to duty, or to give up some beloved idol? It is owing to this enmity. Why do we feel a distance to such as have honesty enough to tell us what they see amiss in us? It is owing to the same fallen temper which is found in all who are not fully renewed in the spirit of their minds.

minds. Nay, is there some times an unwillingness to be roused from that lethargic state which the soul is apt to sink into? It springs from the same source, and is apt to chime in with whatever soothes its stupidity and drowsiness. For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.

6. Self-righteousness will contribute its quota to repel the Lord of glory from his own habitation. We see how powerfully it wrought in the Scribes and Pharisees in the days of old, and it still continues to operate in their offspring to the present day. Indeed we see a tincture of it in all descriptions of the human race, till the impure leaven is purged out. It is not confined to the moral part only; but it is seen in the covetous, the orthodox, the spendthrift, the gambler, the rake, the wanton debauchee, yea, the profligate of every rank and order. All these can thank God they are not as other men are, and can discover some excellency in themselves which is wanting in others; or some bad quality in others which they fancy themselves to be clear of.

In the general, I have discovered most of this self-sufficiency in the men who set up as infallible in orthodoxy; and in these it is generally the most violent. We see this in the zealots of the church of Rome. We do not find them slaying their thousands and tens of thousands by all sorts of torments, for bad practices; they were not matters of *agenda*, but the *credenda*; not matters of acting, but that of believing,

believing, which they murdered them for. But we need not apply this to the Papists only; we see it verified in multitudes styled Protestants, yea, such as reckon themselves of the reformed party too. Nor do we need to apply it to the Calvinist or Arminian, Churchmen or Dissenters exclusively; for in very deed it has been found amongst them all. True faith leads the soul to glorify Jesus in all things; yea, it glories only in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ; and through that same blessed cross, the world and self are crucified to that soul, and it is crucified to them. It counts all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus, its only Lord and Saviour.

IV. I come now to the fourth article in the text, namely, the blessings which will accrue to such as admit the Lord of glory into his temple again. *I will come into him, and sup with him, and he with me.*

1. He will return a sense of his favour to that soul. It must be a very painful sensation to him who once enjoyed that heavenly sunshine, and now to be deprived of it. To have the Sun of Righteousness hid in so dark an eclipse, must spread a horrible cloud over the soul indeed. How piteous is that mournful complaint which Job makes: *O that I knew where I might find him! that I might come even to his seat.—Behold, I go forward, but he is not there: and backward, but I cannot perceive him: on the left hand where he doth work, but I cannot*

*cannot behold him: he hideth himself on the right hand, that I cannot see him.** How mournful is this language? In like manner, *Oh, that I were as in months past, as in the days when God preserved me; when his candle shined upon my head, and when by his light I walked through darkness.†* The same holy longing we see in David, expressed in the most feeling manner. *As the hart panteth after the water-brooks, so panteth my soul after thee O God. My soul is athirst for God, yea, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God!—*In this mournful state he says, *My tears have been my meat day and night, while the insulting infidels say, continually, where is thy God.‡* And again, *In the day of my trouble I fought the Lord: my sore ran in the night and ceased not: my soul refused to be comforted. I remembered God, and was troubled: I complained, and my spirit was overwhelmed.§* And again: *Tell me, O thou whom my soul loveth, where thou feedest, and where thou makest thy flock to rest at noon: for why should I be as one that turneth aside after the flocks of thy companions?||* All this, and much more which might be quoted, shews in feeling language what condition a poor soul is in, that is sensible of the hidings of the divine countenance, and well expressed in the words of our poet:

“ O what

* Job xxiii. 3—10. † Chap. xxix. 2, 3. Psalm xlii. 1, 2, 3.

§ Psalm lxxvii. read the whole. || Song i. 7.

"O what shall I do to retrieve
 The love for a season bestow'd!
 'Tis better to die, than to live
 Exil'd from the presence of God:
 With sorrow, distraction, and doubt,
 With palpable horror oppress'd;
 The city I wander about
 To find my repose in his breast."

In the general, the book of Psalms and the Song of Solomon are books of experience, and can be well understood by souls who have waded through these deep waters. But when Jesus returns, and calls with his own charming voice, *Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away*; how animating is the sound! and more especially when he adds, *For lo, the winter is past; the rain is over and gone: the flowers appear on the earth, and the time of the singing is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land. The fig-tree putteth forth her green figs, and the vines, with the tender grape, give a good smell. Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away.**

The royal Psalmist observes, there be many that will say, Who will shew us any good? Who will increase our worldly store? but, says he, *Lord, lift thou upon us the light of thy countenance*. And, it should seem by what follows, as if he had an immediate answer; for he exclaims, *Thou hast put gladness into my heart, more than at the time that their corn and their wine increaseth.†* Truly, he

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might

* Song ii. 10—14. † Psalm iv. 5, 6.

might well say, *Thy favour*, the light of thy countenance, *is better than life*. How sweet and agreeable is a cheering spring, after a long dreary winter ! or a serene calm after a dreadful storm ! How refreshing are showers after a long and parching drought ! Such, and more abundantly acceptable and cheering, must be the presence of Jesus, the Sun of Righteousness, when he arises with healing in his wings. The case of the prodigal son is much to the purpose ; and the feeling language is well described by the evangelic prophet : *O Lord, I will praise thee : though thou wast angry with me, thine anger is turned away, and thou comfortest me. Behold, God is my salvation : that God whom I have so basely treated, and whose anger I had just cause to fear ; he is now the God in whom I will trust, and not be afraid ; for the same Jehovah is my strength and my song : he is also become my salvation.**

2. If Christ return to the soul, and is admitted, he will purify it ; and indeed it very much needs it ; for in his absence it becomes a cage of unclean birds ; like the temple at Jerusalem, in which were found oxen and sheep, and money-changers, and the seats of such as sold doves ; a very unbecoming sight : and and as our Saviour had to purge the temple of these, so in like manner must he cleanse the soul, his living temple, from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, that it may be *Holiness to the Lord* ; † or that it may be said, *The Lord is there*. All that horrid group of evils which

* Isa. xii. 1, 2.

† Zech. xiv. 20.

which had possession must be driven out : he cannot, he will not associate with them. Indeed, they are very troublesome inmates, very uncomfortable companions, and the sooner we are rid of them the better. Like the old Canaanites, they will be pricks in our eyes, and thorns in our sides, and will render our existence here uncomfortable, and wretched hereafter to all eternity. But how must this be done ? Let the Lord answer. *I will turn my hand upon thee, and will purely purge away thy dross, and take away all thy tin.* Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean : From all your filthiness, and from all your idols will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you : I will take away the heart of stone out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments and do them.† I will cleanse their blood that I have not cleansed ; for the Lord dwelleth in Zion.‡* From hence the church will sing, *To him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and made us kings and priests to God and his Father ; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever, Amen.§*

3. Christ being admitted into his own house, he will not be a transient guest ; not as a way-faring man, that tarrieth but a night : no ; he will take up his

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firm

* Isa. i. 25. † Ezek. xxxvi. 25, 26, 27. ‡ Joel iii. 21.

§ Rev. i. 5, 6.

firm residence there. *I will set up my sanctuary in the midst of them for evermore. My tabernacle also shall be with them; yea, I will be their God, and they shall be my people.* If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.† For thus saith the high and lofty one, that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy, I dwell in the high and holy place; with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the hearts of the contrite ones.‡* From hence it is, that the Apostle, addressing believers, says, Ye are the temples of the living God; and commenting upon the words of the prophet, says, *I will dwell in them, and walk in them.§*

4. He will protect and defend his temple. It is desolate and comfortless when he does not inhabit his dwelling-place. How many snares and temptations are there in the way of the Christian! and what abundant need has he to be kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation! But the Lord is as a wall of fire round about them that receive him, and the glory in the midst of all such. Enemies they have, and such as are eagerly bent upon their ruin. But hear what the Lord saith: *No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper; and every tongue that riseth against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the*

* Ezek. xxxvii. 27.

† John xiv. 2.

‡ Isa. lviii. 15.

§ 2 Cor. vi. 7.

*the Lord,** of all such as cordially receive him. Let them be tried with sickness, pain, crosses, losses, disappointments, all things shall work for their good. Let them be persecuted by the ungodly; the name of the Lord is a strong tower, and the righteous run therein and are safe. The Lord is a refuge for the oppressed in the time of trouble.

David was a man of war, and knew how to compound and accommodate epithets taken from thence; and what a bright assemblage does he collect together, when God had delivered him from the hand of all his enemies, and from the hand of Saul. *I will love thee, O Lord, my strength. The Lord is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God and my strength, in whom I trust; my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower.†* Thus, while Christ's sheep hear his voice, and follow him, they shall never perish, nor shall any pluck them out of his hand.‡ For they that trust in the Lord shall be like mount Zion, which can never be moved, but standeth fast for ever.§ The Lord will bless the righteous, and with favour will he compass them as with a shield.||

Such can sing, God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble: therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, though the mountains be cast, or carried away into the sea.** O happy the people that is in such a case: yea, happy is that people whose God is the Lord! 5. The

* Isa. liv. 16. † Psa. xviii. 1, 2. ‡ John x. 27, 28. § Psa. cxxv. 1.

|| Psa. v. 12. ** Psa. xlv. 1.

5. The soul who receives this heavenly guest shall be a happy partaker of all the benefits of his death and passion. This is expressed in those familiar terms, *I will sup with him, and he with me.* This implies the greatest friendship and familiarity. Perhaps the poor sensible soul may say, Will Christ sup with me? Alas! what have I to entertain him with? I am poor and miserable. "I nothing have, I nothing am." Poor soul! he will not be disappointed in thee; thou hast as much as he expects. He only demands thy love; his kind and reasonable demand is, *My son, my child, give me thy heart.* That is all the entertainment he requires of thee. What had the thief on the cross to give him? He gave him his ruined cause to manage, and so must thou. What had the woman with the bloody issue to give him? The sacred word says, she had spent all her substance upon physicians, and, of course, had nothing left. But he takes delight in blessing; it is the highest treat which thou canst give the Friend of sinners, viz. to suffer him to do thee good in accepting of his blessings. His language is, *Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it. Eat, O friends, eat; drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved.** This blessed stranger brings his heavenly provision with him. He can say, *My flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed.* He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood hath eternal life; and I will raise him up in the last day. I am the bread of life: he that

* Song v. 1.

cometh to me shall never hunger, and he that believeth on me shall never thirst.

6. Such as admit a precious Saviour into their souls here, shall enjoy whatever is good, safe, and honourable here, and shall dwell with him hereafter. This is what is implied in supping with him. This is a promise of glory, honour, and immortality. But it is not in my power to describe this; for eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.

Indeed, we can know little of divine things literally, except by analogy; that is, comparing the things unseen, and consequently unknown to our dark senses, to such things as we do see. The heavenly region is called, the kingdom of heaven, a kingdom which cannot be shaken; a city that hath a foundation, whose builder and maker is God; the New Jerusalem, the house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. This house, or city, is described as being composed of the most costly materials; all that is deemed valuable in nature is collected together, to set forth the excellency of that region which shall be the eternal abode of the saints.

To see more fully what is said of the glorified state, we must consider what the Son of God says to the overcomer in these seven epistles, and crowns the whole with the promise in the context: *To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also have overcome, and am set down.*

down with my Father in his throne. I go, said he, to prepare a place for you; and if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you to myself; that where I am, there ye may be also. To the same purpose he prays, Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory.

What animating language is this! How sweetly is it calculated to encourage the most desponding soul to urge its way to the heavenly kingdom! Such shall find his grace sufficient for them, and his strength made perfect in their weakness! The same encouragement is given to such as are struggling under a sense of their inbred corruptions. These are the elect of God, who are crying day and night for vengeance: and will not God hear them? Yes, and avenge them too, and that speedily. Courage, then, poor tempted soul; thou that art tossed as with a tempest; thy Redeemer is strong; he will thoroughly plead thy cause, and will bruise thine enemies under thee.

Once more, thou lukewarm professor, let me imitate my Lord, and knock at thy heart. Awake, awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee life. Remember how thou art warned, reprov'd, threatened, called upon, invited, intreated. May not the Lord say, What could I have done for that poor soul which I have not done? I have died for him; I have sent my Spirit to convince him; I have sent my servants to
call

call after him, to woo and intreat him ; my Providence has been engaged in his behalf. May not the Lord swear in his wrath, that such a soul shall not enter into his rest ? Lord God Almighty, lay too thy mighty hand ; save these souls ; seize them as the purchase of thy blood ; pluck them as brands from the fire ; take hold of them, and suffer them not to perish ! Follow them with the cry of thy blood. O, let them hear the voice of the Son of God, and in hearing may they live !

Now, to the King immortal, eternal, invisible ; to him that loved us, and washed us in his own blood, and made us kings and priests to God and his Father ; to whom be ascribed all honour, might, majesty, and dominion, world without end. Amen.

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ERRATA.

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